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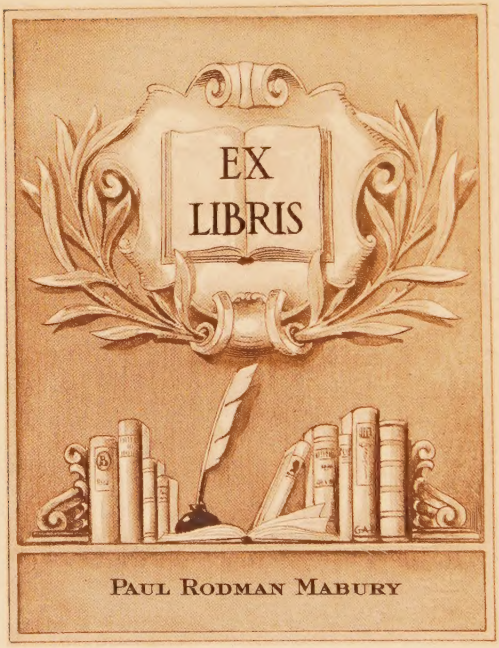

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The FINE ART *of* READING

The FINE ART of READING

By

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LOS ANGELES MUSEUM
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To

MY YOUNG DAUGHTER

DÉSIRÉE

IF, WHEN, AND AS

SHE NEEDS SUCH A BOOK

Acknowledgment

WHEN I was asked by the publishers to write this little book, I was reluctant, first because I never work in the summer and, second, because I spend my summers far from libraries and men of learning. I cannot, therefore, make the usual acknowledgments, which seem so necessary in books by professors.

I cannot, for instance, thank my friends the librarians of Greater Boston for their expert advice and my use of their stacks, because I made a virtue of necessity and wrote it all out of my own head, without recourse to reference aids. Of the dozen books I had with me no one was good for more than a single stray reference or quotation. So my quotations are mostly paraphrases, like the "Bay Psalm Book."

I should, of course, have passed the manuscript round among my friends and colleagues for their friendly criticism and revision. But there weren't any friends and colleagues down here, and, anyway, they all insist that my memory is better than theirs. Furthermore, I do not trust their judgment. They have notions about literature I cannot

approve. By the time they had corrected my grammar, disputed my conclusions, and deplored my attitude, there wouldn't have been any book left. Or it would have been theirs, not mine. So we shall have to leave them out of the picture

There should have been also a graduate student to supply me with all the new material the book contains, as a kind of insurance against next June's doctoral examinations. He would have done the bibliography also—a labor of love. But we do not have graduate students in English at Technology. The professors have to do their own dirty work. So he is out.

According to Hoyle, my wife should have taken the book from dictation, typed the manuscript, read the proof, made the index, and done all the other little jobs for which professors, apparently, keep wives. She didn't. Her part in the job was to keep my small daughter off my neck when she wished to go in swimming and I had to work. *Hic labor, hic opus est!* So the first my wife will see of the book will be when the first copy, suitably bound, I hope, in Japanese vellum with gold end-papers, is laid in her hands. Then she will not read it. She is not one of those who need it. Her comprehension of literature is intuitive.

You will see that nobody is to blame except my-

self. And nobody else gets a nickel's worth of credit. Which makes this book unique amongst the productions of American scholarship.

R. E. R.

Rockport, Massachusetts,
August 25, 1929.

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Part I

THE TEACHER

The FINE ART *of* READING

THIS book is not a text book. It is not intended to be used in connection with any formal high school or college work in literature. It is not intended for illiterates, who, seduced by advertising, believe there are magical short cuts to the "appreciation of literature."

To some extent it is written for certain school teachers, who, however well trained in the mechanics of literature, seem to me, in the many papers of theirs which I have read, to have missed the essential approach.

But mostly it is written for You, who, I hope, are the average serious reader. You are adult and intelligent. You read a good deal, good stuff, and intend to read more, but you have little gnawing doubts. You are not quite sure of yourself. You are not quite sure, for instance, what and why is a classic, and why so many of them, highly praised in text books, leave you cold. You are not quite

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sure what the canons of criticism are. All you know is that you disagree with many professional reviewers. You do not know exactly why they see as they do, and you cannot phrase very clearly why you see as you do. It bothers you that other people seem to see more in a book than you ever can.

You, whether teacher, student or unclassified, are the kind of person I am writing for, and this first chapter hopes to tell you what notions I have arrived at about the teaching of literature, which may serve as introduction for this very informal, undocumented, unacademic book.

It is the fruit of a good many years' teaching of literature to two kinds of people, neither primarily interested in literature: students in an engineering school, who although highly intelligent have never given much thought or time to reading, and who, therefore, feel rather like travelers in a new country for which they have no map; the others, hard-working adults in university extension courses, usually well educated, who when it comes to literature feel that they do not know exactly what to look for, what questions to ask themselves, and who sense vaguely that in some way, which they do not quite comprehend, they are standing in their own light.

These are the two chief troubles, those peculiar

to the reader and those peculiar to the thing read; the eye and the object. They are made more troublesome by the vague notion, held by so many people who have not examined it, that criticism is an exact science.

Exorcising the Absolute

Writers upon literature, critics and teachers of literature, have a dreadful habit of speaking in terms of absolute values. This is literature and that is not. This is right and that is wrong. This is good and that is bad. Engineering students, used to mathematics and physics, accustomed to expressing values and relationships once and for all in a brief formula, take this mistaken attitude for granted, and are bothered when they find they cannot agree with critic or text book.

At the best they distrust their own judgment. When they find it running counter to what they believe is authority, they are only too often inclined to dismiss critic and literature alike with a shrug as incomprehensible. This feeling that the laws of literature are not the laws of this workaday world has alienated needlessly many keen intelligences whose only requirement is a working blueprint, so to speak, of the mystery.

It is harder to forgive the teachers for this attitude. I have met so many, usually normal school

products rather than college graduates, who have learned the "rules" of literature by rote, can apply them competently according to a methodology also learned by rote, but who when confronted with a brand-new piece of writing, one outside the limits of the traditional survey course in English and American literature, from the birth of Beowulf to the death of Tennyson, are completely at a loss. They know no better than the student how to scrutinize the contemporary critic. They only know that this new kind of writing differs from anything they have ever been told about. It is strange, it is unaccustomed; without knowing why they guess that it is not for them, and they take refuge in the thrice-worn, thrice-read canon of literature "appointed to be read in schools." Or, feeling a new spirit akin to theirs, they welcome it ignorantly, without knowing why, without recognizing in it any kinship with the old familiar love, and cherish it as a sweet heresy. Like the Athenians who worshiped ignorantly they need a Paul to declare unto them the unknown God.

For the moment, then, let us make without elaboration a flat statement which may serve as a foundation for this book. *There are no absolute values in literature.* There are no values which may not be estimated in terms of time and place, history and environment, personality of writer, of

critic, and of reader. In short, all values are comparative. And the critic needs to be watched even more than the author.

It is understood, then, that here is no attempt to define or enforce an Aesthetic. This book will attempt only to tell you what to look for if you wish to read more skillfully. For reading is an Art (I am not sure it is not a Science) in which skill, cunning, watchfulness, craftsmanship, the sense of the right way to do a thing, may be learned and applied. Some of the difficulties you will have to look for are in whatever book you are reading; some of them are in the critic (or critics in general); some of them (perhaps most of them) are in you.

The whole duty of a book about reading boils down to two questions: How far can a person be taught to read skillfully? And what can a teacher do to help one acquire that craftsmanship?

On Distrusting the Teacher

About the teacher I am very doubtful. It is so difficult to teach you how to read. But it is so easy to teach you how *I* read. And that, I suspect, is what is usually done. Let us imagine, for example, a course in literature taught in four sections by four people. One instructor prides himself on an eighteenth century mind, prefers Jane Austen,

despises the fantastic and the romantic. Another is something of a romantic idealist, lives by Royce's philosophy of Loyalty, will study "Hamlet" with a class but refuses to touch "King Lear"; a third boasts of having read no new novel since 1900 and applies a hearty Victorian commonsense to the new and the experimental; the fourth has a robust and vulgar appetite for old and new alike, swallows everything and chews nothing, feels rather than thinks, and cannot understand why everyone cannot feel as he does about a writer.

Picture four students, each trained by a different man, trying to reach some common ground before an examination. The process is chaos, the result . . . .? The chances are they will call their teachers fools and literature the province of fools. The same result will follow if one instructor tries to establish definite criteria and another tries to keep the subject as plastic as possible. Once a colleague of mine and I lectured on successive days on poetry. A student complained, "Mr. G—— seemed to think that only a few things he liked were poetry, while Professor Rogers seemed to think almost everything was poetry."

One teacher reading "Hamlet" will be interested chiefly in fine points of theatrical technique, another in a theory of tragedy, still another in

psychoanalyzing Hamlet as a modern neurotic, another in the Elizabethan vocabulary. Ten to one the student is going to get an incomplete and one-sided Hamlet, unless he gives up depending on the teacher, takes the proffered information as a kind of tasty entree, and digs in to reading "Hamlet" for himself. Then he will find a Hamlet which is his own, entirely, which could not possibly be the Hamlet of anyone else, and which, nevertheless, will be Hamlet. For there are as many Hamlets as there are actors, as many as there are readers. The absolute Hamlet died with Shakespeare.

This difficulty is almost inescapable. Even an attempt to lay down an objective theory of literature based on pure reason will be found on examination to be only the rationalization of a prejudice. That is, the thinker builds up a façade of logic to hide the masonry of wish and temperament. Cleverly argued, it will seem utterly objective, and the student will believe he has something demonstrably scientific. If you have ever talked with a convinced disciple of Professor Babbitt, the distinguished Harvard anti-romanticist, you will realize how much more certain is the pupil than the master can ever be.

I am afraid we must leave the teacher out of it, except insofar as he can point out to the reader

what are some of the different tricks of the literary trade to be taken into consideration and what kind of reading technique may solve them. This he may do with some effectiveness. But only if he will admit, in spite of his own private preconceptions, that when a reader faces a book you have only one temperament wrestling with another temperament. The air is full of unknown quantities, standards and landmarks are blown about, and the result is beyond foretelling.

All the teacher, or this book, can do, then, is to build up the power of response or reaction in the reader. That is, to help the reader to a method for making up his mind about books. This may seem easy, but I can assure you, from long experience, that it is the most difficult job in teaching to get a student to *say anything* about a book.

Old-Fashioned and Unashamed

My own method of treating literature is very simple and old-fashioned. We college teachers are the last stand, the forlorn hope, of what might be called intuitive teaching. Presently we shall be extinct as the dodo, for the octopus of Teachers' College pedagogics, the methodology that has already strangled the grade schools and is attacking the high schools, will stretch forth its tentacles for us. The new methodology is very skillful and very

clever, and absolutely necessary, of course, in a democracy where hordes of young girls who are not fitted to teach have to instruct hordes of children who are not fitted to learn. Education must be made fool-proof. Given ten years and our whole educational system will be as standardized as a Ford. But while I live and have my strength I shall try to get along with something a little less complicated. My notion of the ideal teacher is that old Kami, whom Kipling celebrated in "The Light That Failed," Maizie's art teacher whose only word was "Continuez."

My classes are usually too large for the discussion method, even if I had any confidence—which I haven't—in the discussion method. Usually that means gabble, confusion, side-issues, irrelevancies, hectic exhibitionism on the part of a tiny minority, stolid and sullen silence on the part of the majority who have no faith in the ideas of their fellows and no faith in an instructor who studiously refrains from telling what he knows—if he knows anything.

All I pretend to do is to lecture—and I use that formal, reactionary, out-dated word deliberately —for an hour or two on the background of the book. The Time, the Place, and the Man. Even in modern literature this is helpful; in the literature of the past it is absolutely necessary. Students,

normally, *do not know what to look for.* Their sense of even the recent past is dreadfully hazy, their geographical sense muddled, their sense of the infinite mysteries of personality non-existent.

It is not, I take it, the job of a teacher of literature to go over a text with students paragraph by paragraph, pointing out minutiæ or trying to bring them out by Socratic questioning. It is his business to furnish explanatory blueprints, to make maps, to give bird's-eye views, to show relationships, to orient the student, in short, in the author and the civilization under consideration. For himself the student must find out that the book is a unique, but from the teacher he should learn to regard that unique as a function, as the mathematicians say, of the world in which it was produced.

Then I throw them into the book, to sink or swim, asking from them only three things, a careful reading, an attempt at reflection, and a written paper from five hundred to a thousand words long giving their reactions to the book.

Reactions and Responses

That dreadful word "reactions"! In that written paper lies the whole secret. Not a hasty incomplete oral estimate. Not a two page "book report" of the kind required in the mass production high school system. A written paper must give you

room to turn round in, and you can't turn round in much less than a thousand words. And you can't fill a thousand words with ideas unless you have been on the alert all the time you have been reading, catching on the wing your fugitive ideas, imprisoning them on a card as you go along, forcing yourself deliberately to have ideas about what you read.

You will remember that the Abbé Dimnet in his nourishing book "The Art of Thinking" prescribed pencil and notebook in continuous use for anyone who really wished to use his mind. Our modern memories are sieves. Always take notes!

My papers come in. What do I find? About fifty per cent. of them will consist entirely of a careful and utterly stupid repetition of the story. You ask the student to state the theme for you in a paragraph and he is lost. But he can repeat incidents for you in chronological order.

Another thirty per cent. will be what I call the correct normal school literary theme. It will invariably contain a brief *précis* of the author's life and the circumstances of writing the book. It will contain a needlessly full repetition of the contents. The remainder will be a series of critical comments, mathematically interspersed with illustrative excerpts. The only trouble will be that the style of these critical comments will vary from

paragraph to paragraph. They will exhibit without gloss diametrically opposed points of view. They will reveal a scholarship of the ripest and most profound sort, far beyond the capabilities of the average reader. There will be no quotation marks.

In short there will be a farrago of critical snippets, cribbed here and there from edited texts, introductions and notes, from histories of literature and from monographs by distinguished critics. There will be not one original idea in the lot. I am not raising any question of the honesty of the proceeding. That aspect does not interest me. What does interest me is that the student, often a graduate of college or normal school, simply has no conception of what I mean by "reaction" or "response," has never been taught to have ideas of her own, and can, literally, think of no way to proceed except to "look up" authorities and rephrase them. That is the way our public school teachers are trained to teach literature.

Twenty per cent. of the papers will be worth reading. They may be crude, untrained, unskilled in the tricks of the job, but they will be honest. The reader will have been interested, excited, exalted, shocked, horrified, bored or drugged to sleep, and he will tell you so, and he will try to tell you why. That is literary criticism. Anatole

France's "adventures of the spirit among masterpieces" is a lovely and ambitious phrase, but unless the reader can catch the spirit of the phrase and try to apply it his reading will never nourish him.

Helpful Hint

These twenty per cent know intuitively what to look for. The others can be taught what to look for. But not until a couple of notions have been blasted out of them. One notion is that reading a book is a passive process. The other is that if a book doesn't interest you, it is the fault of the book.

I tell my hearers: Reading a book is like dropping chemicals into a test-tube. It is dropping ideas into a brain. There should be a reaction, some kind of an explosion. No explosion, no brain. The book *may* be at fault, but ten to one it is the brain which is inert. Every book contains at least one point where an idea touches your personality and your life, is of immediate interest to you. It may be an idea, it may be an experience. There is the spring-board for your dive into your own spirit. No book but contains a text which you can illustrate from your own interests and memories. A good book will contain dozens. You must jot them down as you come to them. Then, while the book is still fresh in your memory, play solitaire with

your jottings. Out of them will emerge a main theme, a critical conception. The others will hang on that main theme like cooking pots on a crane. And presently you will be sure in your own mind what you think about that book and why you think it.

It is not a process of applying rules, or copying down other men's notions. The ideas of the most famous critic are less useful to you than something you have sweated out for yourself in this fashion.

That is why all teaching of literature can be nothing but the attempt to build up this power of response to the reader. The following chapters merely offer hints, suggest means, show you where to look.

I have one way of stimulating the secretions, which may be worth noting. In my preliminary remarks I always act as special pleader for the author concerned. I do not attempt to criticize, either favorably or unfavorably. I do not attempt to evaluate impersonally. I always try, as well as I can, to present the writer from his own point of view, his intention, his ideal, almost as if it were completely successful. Invariably this arouses opposition. Roughly speaking, the criticism which develops from opposition is more intelligent than that which has its beginnings in a flush of appreciation. But all strongly affirmative criticism, the

working out of a strong emotion, be it anger or ecstatic appreciation, will be more valuable to the reader than that common kind of timid tight-rope walking, balancing the pros and cons which cancel out and leave nothing.

Wax Under the Die

The necessity for this affirmative attitude is shown most strongly when the reader is trying to criticize criticism. Fiction, drama, and poetry is comparatively simple. One can feel the personality behind a poem or play. But to evaluate opinion is, for most people, more difficult.

I have met many students who recognized only two kinds of books, text books and stories. Text books to be swallowed whole and without question, as authoritative; fiction to be swallowed whole without tasting, to pass the time. A student had a thesis to write on The Monroe Doctrine. He had to be given his references, as he had not the slightest idea where to look for them. He read the opinions of some half dozen experts in international law. He dutifully made outlines of the six, pieced them together, copied them down, and handed in his theme. He simply could not be made to see that here were six highly divergent opinions; that it was his business to analyze them, take them apart to see what made them tick, come to

some opinion as to the validity of each of them, then present an opinion of his own.

For twelve years he had been taught, presumably by women teachers, to accept whatever he found in print as authoritative, to keep contradictory ideas in watertight compartments without ever comparing them and coming to a conclusion about them. That is why the average American shows so little interest and so little knowledge about political questions. It is an article of faith in our public schools not to question or criticize the Constitution, the Government, or the acts of our public officials.

The concept of criticism hardly exists in our American schools. The basic proposition of Socrates that the unexamined life is not worth living has simply never occurred to most of our students. "Destructive" criticism, so called, is taboo. Analysis is interpreted as "knocking." Alternative conceptions are termed "radical ideas" and damned without examination. The American boy or girl comes to college with a vague but stubborn idea that all things are for the best in the best of all possible republics. Compared to them Dr. Pangloss was a nihilist.

The root of all this lies deep in the teaching of literature. By literature I intend, with Matthew Arnold, the expression of ideas in print; history,

economics, sociology, as well as poetry and fiction and that rag-bag of writing, the essay. Teachers and pupils alike, we must read great writers instead of reading *about* great writers; we must insist on making up our minds for ourselves instead of letting authorities make them up for us; we must learn to evaluate writers only in terms of our own tempers and the tempers of other writers whom we actually have read.

Prospectus

This book, then, is divided into three sections. I have said all I intend to about the teacher's job, his (or her) opportunities, deficiencies, and need of self cultivation. The others are as follows:

Part I. The Reader; what to look for (and avoid) in yourself.

Part II. The Writer and the Critic; what to look for in the kinds of minds and temperaments that lurk behind all writing.

Part III. The Material; what to look for in the various forms or species of literature.

This book is written, deliberately, down in the country, far from books and libraries. I hope to depend not at all on quotations or illustrative passages. I hope to draw my ideas solely from a dozen years of students' struggles with books, to

evolve this thing, as the German did the camel, entirely from my inner consciousness.

But if you like, as I do, books about literature which are richly embroidered and fortified with illustrative passages from the treasuries of literature, let me recommend two, one old and one new. The first is that already classic volume by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, novelist and King Edward VII Professor of English Literature in the University of Cambridge. It is called "The Art of Reading" (G. P. Putnam) and it is a very wise and beautiful book, the book of a gentleman and a scholar in the classic tradition. The second is by an able American teacher, author already of two excellent books on poetry and drama, Professor Jay B. Hubbell of Duke University. It is called "The Enjoyment of Literature" (Macmillan) and is full of gorgeous extracts on the subject in hand.

I am trying as hard as I can to forget both of them. You will wish, perhaps, to supplement the hints in this volume with the scholarship, to which I do not pretend, of these two others. But read me first!

Part II

THE READER

CHAPTER I

The Obstacle of Ignorance

THE motto I want for this section I first saw some years ago on the title page of Walter Lippmann's first book "A Preface to Politics." It was from Nietzsche. "Thou shalt create a god out of thy seven devils."

This section hopes to show that a good many of the difficulties of reading lie in the reader and that in many cases he is not conscious of them at all. A fat man is quite sincerely unaware how fat he looks to other eyes. Bigots and cranks are quite sincerely unaware of being bigots and cranks, but for all that their relationships with the world are curiously warped. This section, then, is an exorcisation of the five devils of Ignorance, of Provincialism, of Temperament, of Intolerance, and of Age.

The Ignorance of Language

The simplest difficulty to set forth is the difficulty of ignorance, which means not only not knowing enough but knowing the wrong things. It means not only gaps but twists in education. And natu-

rally the basic ignorance in matters of literature is the ignorance of language. I mean simply the English language. One no longer expects Latin or even French or German from our average school product. To know English accurately is miracle enough.

We do not know words enough. Every vocabulary is adding words at a fearful rate. Engineering, physics, psychology, physiology—have remade their vocabularies in a score of years. Aeronautics has created a new language. If we make any attempt to read even superficially in these fields, or in any field of modern thought with a capital M, we must remake our vocabularies. Within the last few years most of us have learned a smattering of the Freudian vocabulary, of the Watson behaviorist vocabulary, of that of the new art and music. Bit by bit we shall probably learn the key words of the Einstein vocabulary. But it means keeping on the alert all the time.

The difficulties of the new vocabulary do not worry me. Youth will pick it up naturally, and the rest of us, people over thirty with stiff minds, will have to learn it or disappear. What worries me is that youth will soon have nothing but a modern vocabulary. For every word we learn we are forgetting a hundred.

We learn many new technical words—granted.

But we are forgetting all the old words, the rich supply of synonyms for common things and common ideas. Outside technicalities our word list grows thin and meager. One word now does the work a dozen shared not so long ago. The average elderly countryman of Yankee stock has at his command a homely everyday vocabulary which is far richer than that of his city-bred grandson. He will have dozens of words for common things, will be able to draw distinctions no longer dreamed of. And if, in addition, he was well trained in "McGuffey's Fifth Reader" he will have an adult vocabulary, both abstract and concrete, which the modern child, fed on literary mush and milk until he is well into high school, has to acquire with difficulty in college. It is a fact that the college student of today has to spend tragically valuable time acquiring and learning to use an instrument that should be at his tongue's end at the age of sixteen.

Particularly is he ignorant of the simple abstract terms, the common coinage, so to speak, of religion, philosophy, ethics, and ideals. No wonder he considers these things "bunk" when the very words that define them mean nothing to him. To have to begin, literally, to create a vocabulary of ideas at the age of eighteen, in order that one may be able to read ordinary nineteenth cen-

tury literature with ordinary facility, is a painful job, so painful that I have known a student to read a whole page, say of John Stuart Mill, with complete incomprehension simply because he hadn't the slightest idea what the key word of the paragraph meant and was too bored and lazy (*i.e.*, too perfect a product of our system) to look it up for himself.

Words With Blurred Edges

The average youngster of today gets his vocabulary not in school but from newspapers, including the comic strips, moving picture captions and sub-titles, the story magazines, and advertisements. All these vocabularies are utterly simple, elementary in content, often slangy, and profoundly vague and inaccurate. An elementary word used to describe a complex thing means of necessity inexactness. The edges are blurred.

These early impressions are almost impossible to efface. Advertising copy writers are freakish in the spelling and the use of words and those freakishnesses are stamped on the young mind. The comic strip artists have lots of fun in distorting the language and the distortions stick. To numberless people today the spelling "villian" for "villain" is sober and commonplace, so often have they seen it. The word "ruination," once a comic

b'gosh Yankee word, is now a matter of course in our news columns. The badly trained young men and women in our newspaper city rooms seriously use "ruination" for "ruin," and "disinterested" for "bored," and "like" instead of "as" with the verb, and stamp those fashions on all newspaper readers. They are beyond eradication now.

The result of all this simplification and popularization, of this trying to treat complex and difficult things in what might be called a hall-room vocabulary, the vocabulary of a non-reading adolescent, is a widespread inexactness, a blurring of meaning. Taking an illustration from a course I have given on American politics, it is almost impossible to establish in a student's mind the distinction between those two words which are actually as far apart as the poles, "socialist" and "anarchist." Not one student or adult in a hundred can define "bolshevism" by anything but the most inaccurate approximations. The distinction between "liberal" and "radical" does not exist for most people. Even if a student learns these definitions by rote, the habit of years will be too strong for him and in practice he will muddle them beyond recognition. Think of all the ignorant variations played on the phrase which Judge Lindsey defined so simply and exactly, "companionate mar-

riage." So few people even took the trouble to find out what was intended by the words.

And since one cannot think without words, this means that the thinking of the majority of our people on subjects political, religious, philosophical, and social, is so blurred and inexact that there exists almost no correction in reason for the merely emotional response of liking and disliking.

You can't think without words. You can't read without thinking. The first job in reading, then, is to keep your mind on words, to treasure up every new word in your memory and be sure you know *exactly* what it means.

Clear and Concise

The second trouble in reading resulting from ignorance lies in the increasing inability to deal easily with long sentences. I am convinced that the chief reason for the distaste our young people feel for Dickens and Scott and the nineteenth century writers is that they have been deliberately taught the fallacy that the best expression is the briefest and most rapid.

Teachers who ought to know better have been infected with the false notion that since simple ideas, like advertising propositions, moving picture sub-titles and news "leads," can be expressed most effectively very briefly, the more complex and

important ideas of a civilization are the better for being expressed in the same way. This notion is obviously false, but you can't blast it out of students, who meet every demand for elaboration and clarification through exact qualification with the parrot phrase that "clear and concise" phrasing is the best.

Mature thinking is discriminating thinking. Discriminating thinking demands subtle and exact phrasing. To be concise is not always to be clear. Often it is only to be incomplete and vague.

Elementary thinking phrases itself in repetitive short sentences, or in that kind of loose sentence which keeps on adding belated fragments of the idea until complete incoherence results. Mature thinking is almost invariably periodic, the extended sentence, full of exact qualifications, which keeps its sense suspended, the idea in solution, until the triumphant last word which completes the picture.

The periodic sentence is simple enough for the mind that has been disciplined to it. But ten years of reading nothing but the simplest statements in the public prints and of being taught that this is the way to write gives our college students a hall-room style to match a hall-room vocabulary.

When the product of such a training goes up against the deliberate, leisurely, exact, discriminat-

ing writers of the nineteenth century, he almost literally has to construe their sentences as if they were in French or German. His mind cannot hold a periodic sentence in solution till its end is reached, cannot hold the progression of thought in a reasonably long paragraph—and blames the writer instead of his teacher and himself.

You cannot express cathedral ideas in hall-room sentences.

The richness of the style of Edmund Burke, of George Eliot and Henry James, is the inevitable result of the richness of their minds playing over their material. The thin and hurried brevity of much modern fiction is the brevity of writers who apart from yarn-spinning have nothing to say. It will be said that the parables of Jesus are the traditional examples of superb and successful simplicity. Exactly, because here a great artist is deliberately phrasing his thought to catch the meanest intelligence. But you will not find that bare simplicity in the great climaxes of Job or St. Paul. Those are for adults, not children.

To overcome this first hurdle in reading means constant exercise. You can put up reading muscle as you can put up jumping muscle only by strenuous practice. It is easy enough to stay in the A B C's of reading. But to read what mature

minds have written for mature minds means simply the will-to-read and plenty of exercise.

Gresham's Law

Gresham's law, if I remember my economics, insists that cheap and adulterated money drives out sound money and thus debases the coinage. The application is obvious. The cheap movie tends to supplant or debase the good movie; the better movie tends to supplant the spoken drama. The college with low admission requirements makes it harder for the conscientious college to keep up its enrollment. The indiscriminate A.B. of the state university makes the traditional A.B. mean less and less.

The third difficulty of ignorance is that the enormous exploitation of cheap literature, cheap art, cheap music, cheap drama is making that cheap and easy standard the norm for thousands of people, the only thing they know, the only thing they have to judge by.

Publishers, producers, hack artists, in short all the culture exploiters, will say, of course, that they must give the public what it wants. That is one of the lies of the Father of Lies and must be nailed whenever you hear it. Human nature is infinitely plastic. The crowd always takes the easiest way. Progress comes from the obstinate individual who

refuses to take the easiest way. But human kind in mass will adapt itself easily to what it is given. Of late it has adapted itself so completely to intentionally cheap art that it knows no other standards. The exploiter simply plays on this human weakness.

Art is primarily recreation. But recreation exists on four levels: fun, amusement, pleasure, enjoyment. Today these four values are hopelessly muddled. Time and time again people complain to me that such and such a book or play is not amusing. When I have whittled their complaint down to its essentials I find out that they expect a novel or play to tickle their senses and make the time pass pleasantly without any effort on their part. The movie melodrama or "comedy" does that. The jazz orchestra does that. So does the comic strip.

But any piece of writing or painting or music which demands more than passive reception, which requires an effort of the mind to enjoy or of the taste to appreciate, seems to them quite removed from recreation. They balk at it as a car with half its cylinders missing balks at a hill. The spark plugs of their power of enjoyment are foul, need to be cleaned.

Fun and amusement may be childish, unintelligent, passive. Pleasure and enjoyment involve

some effort. Comprehension and appreciation involve response. Taste is not an accident. Taste is a growth that must be watered and cultivated. All mature art, good music, thoughtful painting, imaginative literature demands as much as it gives and will not give without response.

The intelligent person perceiving that other intelligent people seem to get pleasure out of something that as yet gives him no pleasure will try to find out what causes it. Nine times out of ten he will succeed. There is no arbitrary level to reach. Each will climb as far as his capacities and taste allow. Some will be content to stop with "Hamlet"; others will struggle up to "Faust." That does not matter. There will be enlargement, a sense of new territory opened up, even though one does not completely explore it.

To one person only all this does not apply, the determined Low-brow. The Low-brow is not the person who can't make the grade. Nor is he the person who simply can't conceive that there is a grade to make. For there are, of course, people for whom nothing can be done; for whom this concept of art I have been talking about is as unthinkable as the conception of three dimensions to the dweller in Flatland. That is why the democratic theory that literature and art should be

taught to everybody is utterly wasteful and extravagant. And futile.

No, the Low-brow is he who deliberately determines to remain on the low and easy level of easy and vulgar amusement and will do all he can do to prevent others from enjoying what he will not enjoy. We have nothing to do with him in this book. There are more of him than we think, all the same. He has aliases in the political and the religious world. And collectively he is the greatest danger to our civilization.

Pollyanna and the Penny Whistle

The last difficulty of ignorance I shall deal with is akin to the third, perhaps only another angle on the third. It has to do with the widespread willingness, nay determination, to be simple and elementary instead of mature and complex. I have heard so many people say, for instance, "I have never tried to read European literature because I didn't think I would understand it." "I like books that are easy to read, that give you their message plainly, so I didn't finish 'Faust.'" "I think that a writer like Winston Churchill whom anybody can understand is a greater writer than H. G. Wells whom you have to think about." (These are excerpts from papers.)

This is like the fallacy that the shortest sentence is the clearest. It arises from the belief that

those ideas which are good for the human race can always be explained so simply that a child can understand them, whereas anything which seems more complex is by that fact the work of a crank, a professor, or some other pervert whom it were well to disregard.

What seems so hard for folk to grasp is that the same idea may be expressed in childish terms for a child's mentality or may evolve into the kind of complex and mature discussion suitable for grown-ups.

They hear the preacher read from St. Paul, "When I was a child I spoke as a child and understood as a child, but now that I am a man I have put away childish things," yet they will go on in perfect contentment reading novels well within the mental grasp of a ten year old child, without realizing the inadequacy of either book or reader, even resenting any attempt to lure them up to an intellectual landing a few steps higher.

Let us take as a simple example a book which for some years has been very rightly laughed at—but for the wrong reason. It has been the fashion of sophisticated reviewers to use it as a stock example of the imbecility of the human mass. It is "Pollyanna," by the late Eleanor Porter, a book almost universally known. It is usually jeered at as expressing a silly philosophy, the "glad" philos-

ophy, the philosophy of being happy when things go wrong.

Now that is not a silly philosophy at all. It has in it a good deal of Stoicism, a good deal of that which Robert Louis Stevenson expressed in *"Pulvis Et Umbra,"* the doctrine that the peculiar glory of man is that he has kept flying the flag of hopefulness in a hopeless world. The critics who call it silly philosophy as compared, say, to Nihilism, are simply not capable of disentangling an idea from the form in which it is expressed.

For the real reason for laughing indulgently at "Pollyanna" is that this brave philosophy of stoic-hedonism, to coin a term, is expressed in childish terms for childish minds, and yet is read seriously by millions of adults. My ten year old daughter read it, liked it, and passed on to other things. But there are hordes of people in this country who remain contentedly and even a bit cockily on this childish level of reading, "Pollyanna" and "God and the Groceryman," the spoon victuals of literature.

Perhaps you can persuade such people to climb a few steps to Warwick Deeping's "Kitty." They will enjoy it, though it is perceptibly more mature than "Pollyanna." But it is lively and amusing, it reads easily, it is a good adolescent statement of the same thesis, that it is possible to be glad and

to be optimistic and to remould the world nearer to your heart's desire. But the theme, played in "Pollyanna" on a penny whistle, is here scored for a dance orchestra, not a bad one at that.

Then, a long step up, perhaps it is possible to get the "Pollyanna" addict to tackle a great nineteenth century novel, "Martin Chuzzlewit" by one Charles Dickens. It is long, it is complex, it is full of characters and geography and happenings. It is the work of one who, with all his faults, is a great writer, who knows the world as a busy and complex thing that takes a bit of understanding and who weaves out of life a tapestry rich and variegated that insistently says something. And when you reach the point where in the wilderness of America, with Martin ill, money gone, fever and failure triumphant, Mark Tapley lifts his happy head and declares that it is some credit to a man to be jolly under these circumstances, you realize that you are hearing once more the same ancient theme, "Glory to Man in the highest for Man is the master of things," blared out by the full orchestra of nineteenth century romanticism.

There is, perhaps, one more step. Some will not take it, but those who do will find in "Lazarus Laughs" by Eugene O'Neill the theme again. Here Lazarus, raised from the dead, asserts with laughter, in the face of pain and loss and death

again, that there is no death. The play is unlike any other ever written, with its masked figures, its chorus of symbolic masks, its half lyric, half dramatic form, but it is recognizably only another orchestration of the Pollyanna theme scored this time in the complex and dissonant melodies of twentieth century music.

Granted that the Pollyanna theme is a good theme for the human soul, surely it is better to hear it played by Dickens than by Mrs. Porter; surely it is good to hear it played by O'Neill as well as by Dickens.

To be forever satisfied and complacent with the penny whistle when you might be making an effort to hear the harmonies of the orchestra is the last obstacle of ignorance in reading.

I take it for granted that any intelligent person who becomes aware of these obstacles will make up his mind to surmount them. Surmounting them for most people is only a matter of will and exercise. No one wants to live in a hall-room forever. The time comes when you need an apartment, or better still a house, where you can go up and down stairs, with a cellar and an attic and a lawn.

This chapter is only to prick you into remembering that your living quarters may be narrower than you think.

CHAPTER II

The Obstacle of Provincialism

"But John P.
Robinson, He
Says they didn't know everything down in Judee!"

FROM Benjamin Franklin down to Will Rogers our literature has encouraged provincialism in its readers. It has held up the tastes and notions of the average undifferentiated, unimproved American as the ideal yard-stick by which to measure other civilizations and other ideas than ours.

Henry James spent a long life striving, in an artist's anguish, to explain to Americans exactly what Europe might mean to them. But Americans preferred vastly the loud yawps of Mark Twain at European languages and food, castes and priesthoods, ideas and bathing facilities. And in spite of a certain veneer of knowledge and interest, acquired since 1914, that there exists a real world which is not American, one of the rock-bottom obstacles to intelligent American reading is provincialism.

Europe is only an extreme example. There is

that provincialism of New York and New England about the West. There is that even more determined and dogmatic provincialism of the West about the East. There is the provincialism of the city for the country, of the country for the city; of the native born for the immigrant, and, lately, of the second generation immigrant for the native born. There is no one quite so contemptuous of the elder breed that made these states as the New York intellectual whose father was a European peasant.

The Provincial

Provincialism is simply another form of ignorance, this time born of inexperience. When the imagination is atrophied one can not conceive of any life other than that one has lived, of any standards other than those one has known. A provincial is one capable of learning only through personal experience, never through the imagination and the mind. He is one who goes the whole hog. He cannot believe he is patriotic unless he is chauvinistic. He cannot love his own country without despising others. He must approve his own experience one hundred per cent; he approves his own experience only by discounting all possible others.

He is instant with his criticism of others: he

fiercely and childishly resents criticism of him and his; he feels rather than thinks; he cannot analyze criticism; he objects blindly and hotly. He is Ptolemaic; he knows he is the center of his universe and you can't tell him different. Wherever he goes he takes with him the standards of his youth and his home town. He is incredibly self-satisfied. He is unimaginably thick-skinned. He spawns in America.

At bottom, I fancy, this provincialism of ignorance is born of timidity. It is born of the reluctance to hazard new fortunes. At home we are on safe ground; we can speak with authority. Abroad we are always afraid of making fools of ourselves. We half recognize that it would be all right to do as the Romans do—if only they didn't do such funny things! The feeling begins in childhood when we demand the same story over and over again, because we know how that story ends and nobody can fool us.

I find it in women's clubs that much prefer to hear the old thing rehashed than to risk hearing about something new and strange. The school girl who prefers the stories of the commonplace today to historical romances, the college man who, left to himself, will read the most banal American novel in preference to the most distinguished English one, all express unconsciously the feeling that

what is familiar is safe and right, what is strange is hostile and wrong. It is as if people were afraid to use their imaginations and sympathies lest they wear them out.

That is why the Athenians conquered their conquerors and stamped a whole age and a whole civilization with their genius; always they were eager to see and hear some new thing.

On the surface this provincialism seems cocky and imperturbable, but is it not possible that it is only protective coloration, that it masks a profound childish uneasiness, a dread of being judged by strange standards and found wanting? It is an inferiority complex that keeps provincials safe at home. The cosmopolitan, being capitain of his soul, is by that fact everywhere at home.

The best thing that ever happened to us is that rash of local-color sectional literature that broke out in the United States in the generation after 1861-1865. The diplomats who did more than any others to heal the wounds of war were Thomas Nelson Page, George W. Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, Bret Harte and Mark Twain, Mary E. Wilkins and Sarah Orne Jewett. They taught Americans how the other half lived. They broke down barriers of geography and history; they made familiar and credible manners and notions not our own; they humanized these United States

for us. One can name a long and distinguished list of recent writers who have kept up the good work. Politics and economics, fundamentalism and prohibition have done their best to divide us. Literature has come measurably near uniting us.

The cure for provincialism is copious reading with an open mind. There are, of course, those whose minds are hermetically sealed, for whom nothing can be done. But they are not reading this book.

People Don't Do Such Things!

Some of the simpler manifestations of provincialism would be funny if they were not symptoms of something really serious. I have had a college sophomore tell me that Eugene O'Neill is all wrong in his portrayal of forecastle life in the Glencairn plays. He was a nice boy who had lived all his nineteen years in a Boston suburb, proceeded duly from high school to college, had probably never, in the words of H. G. Wells, "known what it was to be really hungry or frightened or exhausted," his travel experiences motor trips in New England, his standards those of a middle class suburban family. "The Moon of the Caribees" existed so little for him that he took refuge in the assertion that it didn't exist at all.

I have had a competent suburban school

teacher, a spinster of forty, product of the normal school, Yankee to the core, tell me that she thought Tolstoi's portrayal of life in Anna Karenina, particularly the portrait of Anna herself, incredible. It was not that she was objecting to it. She simply did not believe it had existed or could exist.

You remember how Judge Brack, with Hedda Gabler's pistol shot ringing in his ears, remarks helplessly, "People don't do such things!"

These Judge Bracks one is running up against all the time in teaching literature. Theirs is a provincialism which might be called innocence of experience. They cannot see that Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths and his Roberta in "An American Tragedy" are typical, that Dreiser is making literature out of the commonest phenomena of the front page of the American newspaper. They insist on regarding the story as a horrible exception to our comfortable American experiences and resent it accordingly. With Howells they believe that the more smiling aspects of life are the more American, in spite of the dreadful evidence to the contrary on every page of newsprint.

Having had no personal contact with most of the hundreds of violent variations and perversities possible in human character, they cannot possibly imagine them. Much of literature, therefore, is to

them a fantastic dream from which they can learn nothing. I have seen people reject as incredible exactly those passages in Carl Van Vechten's "Peter Whiffle" which are most thickly documented with photographic description.

Such people are imaginatively numb. No amount of stimulus seems to get the blood circulating. Like the needle to the north they swing eternally to the belief that Life is as it is lived in their suburb and on their street. All else is false, the inventions of unscrupulous men who betray the Muse of History.

To them one can only recommend the example of the White Queen, who was in the habit of forcing herself to believe five unbelievable things every day before breakfast.

"Orthodoxy Is My Doxy"

A second form of this provincialism is that which insists that whatever is familiar must be right; that one's own definitions are the only possible definitions. This applies particularly to portrayals of morals and conduct in literature. If you insist on judging the conduct of an Athenian of 450 B.C. by the standards of a Bostonian of 1850 A.D. you are going to miss something. You are perhaps going to miss the point entirely. On the other hand, if you can realize that a man or

woman may live by standards which are not your standards and still be a good citizen and a decent person, you will have, without compromising your own standards of practical living in the least, learned something about human nature.

You can measure heat and cold by centigrade or fahrenheit. You can measure good and bad by all sorts of standards and there will still emerge the essential concept of human decency. But the chances are that what you are clinging to most fiercely are things which other times and manners regarded as non-essentials. You must remember that in the United States we are judging conduct still in terms of the Judaic-Pauline traditions, and that the Graeco-Roman traditions, the Mediterranean *mores,* have never taken root in us. Recognition of the fact that there is after all more than one standard, that morality is to a certain extent geographical, will not change your own conduct, but it will help you to be adequate in dealing with other people, and it will enormously help you to understand literature.

Let me take a simple example of what I mean. The American reading much of European literature, as well as much of the literature of the Renaissance and the Elizabethan age, is bothered by the obvious fact that in such literatures a strong affirmative expression of emotion in action is

taken as a matter of course, as even an admirable thing.

Yet I have seen student after student characterize such figures as Benevenuto Cellini, Shakespeare's Mark Antony, Mary Stuart, Ibsen's Nora, as *weak*. Of all words! The idea, inherited from the old Sunday School literature, is that if these people had been really strong they would have said NO.

This doctrine, that restraint is always an affirmative thing, that violence, emotion, extravagant action are really weakness, is so deeply rooted in our belief that it vitiates for us large tracts of classic English literature and modern European literature. We simply cannot understand such figures as these if we so read them. And yet it is incredibly hard to persuade people that asceticism, self restraint, negation, may be quite simply the result of colorlessness and cowardice, the inability to adjust yourself to life and conquer it. Gusto, emotion, license may be the result of strength, not weakness.

Dante put in Hell both those who lived sadly in the sweet air and those who made "the great refusal." That point of view is profoundly alien to us. We must learn to judge conduct from that angle, too, or much of humanity will remain for-

ever and profoundly alien to us—and Terence will have lived in vain.

The High-brow

As a matter of fact this shrinking from gusto in life as well as in literature is the hall-mark of the High-brow. Just as the nineteenth century purged the dictionary of many a strong, vivid, vulgar word that we need badly, so it purged the concept of gentleman and lady of many strong, vivid, affirmative traits which are always to be found in the great periods of civilization. Thank heaven, a good many of them seem to be coming back! The nineteenth century gentleman and lady didn't *do* things about which their fathers and mothers would not have wasted a scruple. They didn't *say* things. As Mark Twain remarked seriously to his wife, "Livvy, you are steadily emasculating the English language." They tried not to *think* things.

The result is that curiously colorless and negative conception of culture held by so many excellent elderly and middle-aged people. H. G. Wells in his book "The Future in America" symbolized it as that statuette of the Winged Victory, with its frozen stride, which he found in so many Boston drawing rooms.

Your genuine High-brow is the simon pure provincial of the spirit. Whenever a new book

comes out he reads an old one. He prefers the eighteenth century to the nineteenth and the nineteenth to the twentieth. He is full of arbitrary rejections. He will not go to the moving pictures, he will not listen to jazz. He reads only English novels because American fiction is becoming increasingly vulgar. Or he will read Thornton Wilder but not Sinclair Lewis. He will read Galsworthy but not Wells. He has brought himself to taste gingerly of Walt Whitman but he retches at Carl Sandburg. He acknowledges Monet but still balks at Cézanne. He thinks Brahms perfect, rules out Puccini, walks out on George Gershwin. Babbitt (Irving not George F.) and Paul Elmer More are his gods.

The test, in short, of a High-brow is this: if a work of art, literature, music or philosophy, is rich, full-flavored, fresh, original, touched with vulgarity, popular, if in short it has gusto and life, he will have none of it. If it is sanctioned by tradition, if it is inclined to be thin, cerebral, genteel, if it is distinctly not popular, if it is imitative, if it sets neither mind, spirit or flesh a-tingling, if it accords, in short, with all those negative conceptions of culture and behavior which were the nineteenth century marks of gentility, then he will welcome it and be content. Or, more often, she. The high priestesses of the cult are Miss Repplier and Mrs.

Gerould. Like the Bourbons, they learn nothing and they forget nothing.

Matthew Arnold stigmatized the thought and literature of England during his period as provincial. In thought as in politics England deliberately kept herself insulated from what was going on across the Channel. Her romantic poetry, he said, was provincial simply because her poets did not know enough. From Chaucer to Alexander Pope England was in the current of European literature. From the Romantic movement until recently it was almost impossible to treat English literature in terms of comparison with the continent.

Henry James once said that the peculiar characteristic of Nathaniel Hawthorne was provincialism. He succeeded when he was writing about Salem, he failed miserably when he was writing about Rome. We have had plenty of examples since.

These examples go to show that literature may be provincial and still be important. But the reader of great literature must deliberately not be provincial or he will find great tracts, where the human spirit has flourished most richly, closed to him. Our provincial Congress sets provincial tariffs on the fruits of cultures not American. Our American writers and publishers must be protected against those foreign artists who have a

lower standard of living and a higher standard of writing.

It is not beyond possibility that were we to read more good foreign books we should read more good American books. Better that than to read *all* books in terms of our own village culture.

CHAPTER III

The Obstacle of Temperament

"Everyone is queer," said the Quaker to his wife,
"Except thee and me, and thee is a little queer."

THIS determination to keep oneself insulated from unfamiliar experiences is not a matter of environment merely, it is a matter of temperament as well. The intellectual libertine exists in the narrowest of New England or Southern towns; one has known intellectual prudes in Greenwich Village.

We all tend to live in one mood, a tendency which unfits us to deal generously with literature, for literature, in the words of one of Kipling's titles, is "a diversity of creatures." So accustomed are we to take for granted that our temperament is the right and only one that when we disapprove of people's actions we are wont to postulate deliberate motives, instead of recognizing that other folks' actions are quite as much the result of unescapable temperament as our own. If we so judge people, how much more do we judge those temperaments that stamp themselves upon all written records.

THE OBSTACLE OF TEMPERAMENT

The stupidest reader is the one without taste or knowledge, whose temperament is the final judge of books. Such a one is the bane of desk clerks at public libraries. All she can ask for is "a good novel" or "nice love story." She wants one like that she had last week, or she hopes she will never get another like that. If the library clerk (as is sometimes the case) is equally lacking in knowledge and taste, all will be well, and the reader can entertain herself with a placid succession of characterless stories and banal travel books.

For it is precisely the person most blindly guided by temperament who most fiercely resents strong temperaments in the books he or she reads.

Literary Fodder

If one were to attempt to characterize the bulk of the fiction that fills our circulating libraries and is bought without question by public library trustees, the book that is read by hundreds while better books are read by dozens, the composite picture will be something like this.

It will be a commonplace story of commonplace people of today. There will be nothing in the time or place to require any effort in the understanding of either. There will be comparatively little description or pictorial sense but a considerable amount of flavorless conversation in the idiom of

the day; the rest will be episodic action, loosely constructed, occasionally rising to mild melodrama but generally placid enough. It will be "romantic," *i.e.* it will be primarily a love story, "a nice love story without any sex in it." It will be conventional in that it will present life in the most ordinary patterns free from major disturbances. Such disturbances as creep in will be solved strictly according to convention. It will be "idealistic," that is, it will go on the assumption that good intentions always win. "The good end happily and the bad end unhappily; that is what fiction means," said Oscar Wilde, speaking of such books.

It will be mildly humorous, mildly pathetic, never enough really to stir one. There will be character sketching in terms of familiar types. There will be no attempt to motivate character in terms of realistic psychology. There will be no ideas expressed either implicitly by the characters or explicitly by the author. There will be no attempt to make the book a "criticism of life." It will be simply a record, a conventional rendering of conventional people seen by a writer without imagination or discrimination, one who has merely the facility of telling a story. It will throw no new light on character, show none of the myriad strange possibilities of life, stimulate no thinking. It will leave its readers precisely as it found them,

neither exalted or depressed, stirred or stimulated. In other words it will have none of the pharmaceutical properties which properly belong to literature. Because, finally, it will have no style, no sense of the power of words to create new worlds for us.

Such books are the cold boiled macaroni of literature. They are written and published by the hundreds, read by the thousands. They form the staple diet of the circulating library. They find unquestioned entrance to the public libraries from which their betters in style, beauty, and truth to life are rigorously excluded. They are utterly innocuous, utterly safe, the fodder of a democracy which is intentionally kept insulated from ideas and emotions by those in authority who fear both.

You will say that cold boiled macaroni is nourishing. I will reply that besides being tasteless, it is almost pure starch, and starch nourishes nothing but blubber. That large portion of our American public that feeds exclusively on such books gets nothing but fatty degeneration of the head, heart and spirit. Its digestion becomes so deranged that, like the poor weaver in Hauptmann's play, it can't keep meat down.

I speak seriously, because for years I have had the experience of introducing college boys and girls to what is often their first experience of the

meat and wine of literature. Their first, except for the medicated pemmican they have been fed in preparation for college entrance examinations. For pleasure they have read only such imitations of literature as I have described. A novel has come to be something to be swallowed whole for the story, without chewing and without tasting. The idea that a story is anything more than a rapid narrative, as rapid as possible, comes as a stark surprise. The idea that a novel may have a point of view and a flavor of personality, that it may describe life from strange new angles, may discuss and exhibit conduct, is even more of a shock. And how they resent it!

I said, college boys and girls. The state of many a college graduate, of many a normal school graduate who is actually teaching literature in our public schools, is no more healthy. It is the normal state of most of us who have been steeped in the current notions of what imaginative literature ought to be.

Another American Credo

Let me try to list these categorically, the usual reactions of the American temperament to literature.

1: It may serve to pass the time when there is

nothing else to do. As a pastime it ranks slightly above conversation and far below bridge.

2: It should be of such a nature as not to tire the mind. It must not be "deep." In style it should be rapid and easy. Long descriptions or analyses, serious conversations only clog the story.

3: It must not seriously engage the emotions. Anything powerful enough whether in choice of theme or style of treatment to upset one's complacence or linger disturbingly in the emotions causes an emotional fatigue which is not good for one.

4. It must refrain from dealing with subjects that decent people pride themselves on not thinking about. If it must treat them, its detail and phrasing must not go beyond the limits set by casual conversation in a mixed company of comparative strangers.

5: If it attempts criticism, that criticism must always be constructive and never destructive. (Thus squaring the circle.)

6: It must do violence to none of the accepted beliefs, prejudices, or notions of the average majority.

7: It should keep away from the more unfortunate aspects of life. Why, when there is so much sorrow and suffering in the world, should anyone want to put it in a book? It should be cheerful and

optimistic about things that can't be helped. It should leave a good taste in the mouth.

8: Finally, it should be "idealistic." This does not mean that it should believe in remoulding this world nearer to the heart's desire. It means that it should say this world is good, is growing better, and that, in the long run, the truth and the right always conquer.

This, I seriously believe, is the unexamined feeling about literature that most people have unconsciously soaked up and retain.

I believe, with equal seriousness, that such a criterion rules out absolutely all the recognized great literature of the world.

It rules out, without question, all the history, philosophy and science. But it also rules out all the great poetry, drama, and that protean thing we call fiction.

It rules them out because it shows the most complete ignorance of how the imaginative artist functions. It would if it could, like Plato and Tolstoi in their less enlightened moments, keep him from functioning altogether. For the imaginative artist is nothing more or less than a strong temperament with powers of expression. He is not primarily a thinker but a feeler. He feels so strongly about things that he makes you very un-

comfortable in *your* feelings. You must stop your ears or his mouth. If his powers of expression are equal to his feelings he becomes a trumpet at whose vibrations the walls of Jericho quiver and crash down. And all these people we have been describing own real estate in Jericho.

The Artist Temperament

The greatest crime you can commit against the artist is to demand that he suit your temperament instead of being true to his own. Maupassant felt this in his famous preface to "Pierre and Jean" when he said in effect: readers besiege the artist, asking him to write something, to make one happy, to make another sad, another inspired, to comfort one, exalt another, inform this one, amuse that. Only the genuine lover of literature, who respects its priest too much to try to dictate, says: make me something beautiful in the spirit and in the form which you choose, following your own temperament. (This is only a paraphrase; you should look up the essay.)

Joseph Conrad tells us in the equally valuable preface to "The Nigger of the Narcissus" that all the artist can do is "to make you see, to make you feel—above all to make you see."

The artist is not trying to force his feeling about the world on you. You needn't read him,

but if you do you must do him the common courtesy of making an effort to fit his mood, as you would a stranger's whom you met in company. The artist can't help his mood. He is sensitive—not like a spoiled child but like a camera film. He sees, hears, tastes and feels with more sharpness of sensation than most of us. He sees and feels with such clarity and poignancy that he cannot rest until he has somehow given that impression permanent form in writing, painting or music. He sweats and struggles, literally, to preserve that sensation with the least possible leakage.

The less the leakage the greater the artist. The greatest artist preserves as much as it is humanly possible to preserve of a fleeting sensation. Then, like an orthophonic record, he is able to play it back for us.

To take another illustration, when we approach a piece of imaginative literature it is like attempting to tune in to a radio station. Our business is simply to make an effort for the moment to adjust the dial of our temperament with the utmost exactness, so as to get the artist's sound waves as perfectly as possible. Sometimes, for all our best endeavors we can not put ourselves in the mood. But more often we deliberately set our mood against his, refuse to let him send us that impression which is uniquely his. The result is like start-

ing a vacuum cleaner in the neighborhood of the radio. The result is static. This static is about as near as some people ever come to genuine criticism.

All reading, then, is a clash of temperaments. But the wise reader will deliberately soft pedal his temperament for the time being in order to allow that of the artist full sway. This does not mean that you must subordinate your intellectual convictions to his. That is a secondary matter, something to be considered later in cold blood, after the book is closed. But you haven't really the right to differ with an artist in his reading of life unless you have honestly tried to understand to the fullest his feeling about it.

Zola says somewhere: "Literature is a corner of life seen through a temperament." Both phrases are important. It is only a corner of life, that corner which the artist knows. There are almost no universals in literature. To those few universals we own we give the final homage of a veneration almost religious. But most writers can see at best only a corner. The Great American Novel of thoughtless criticism is, and must be, only a myth. There are only great novels about corners of America.

And these corners the artist can only comprehend through his feeling. The method, which is

intellectual, may be common to many, but the comprehension, which is intuition, is always and invariably a unique. No two artists ever show the same whorls and loops on the finger prints of their temperaments. No two critics either, for that matter. No two readers. That is why a book like this may be not entirely useless.

Prescription

I have through much experience come to use certain writers as calorimeters in determining a person's natural aptitude for reading. I say calorimeter, for these writers are of a temperament to produce friction and heat, normally, in the reader.

Writers like the cool and canny Stevenson are no good for such a purpose, nor the genteel and careful Howells, nor the buoyant Rostand nor the ingratiating Barrie.

But some others can always be counted upon to rouse strange searchings of the spirit in the green readers: Thomas Hardy, brooding upon his universe of blind mischief; Walt Whitman, violent egocentric mystic; Dostoievsky, the sin-eater; H. G. Wells, that bumptious and irrepressible Utopian; Bernard Shaw, poet of the creative will; D'Annunzio, adventurer, mediaevalist, epicure in sensualism; Strindberg, the mad anti-feminist;

Dreiser, heavy-footed, honest, heart-breaking recorder of mechanisms in motion; Oscar Wilde.

These are all poets, all strong not to say violent temperaments, all fabulous beasts to the boy or girl who has been thinking that Booth Tarkington is just about all right. Strong medicines, bleedings and blisterings and boluses of blue mass for an ailing literary temperament. Usually the patient thrives on the prescription. Occasionally a boy will tear his Strindberg play from the book and burn it; once in a while a convent-bred girl will ask permission to substitute Barrie for Shaw. But not often.

The papers they write will sputter and crackle, hiss and burn. There is nothing that so displays a fundamental sturdy Americanism as such a course of sprouts. So far as I can see, in most cases, their intellectual processes function about as before, their commonsense remains unimpeachable, their American notions about conduct are if anything sharpened on this rough wheel. But they do mature in their imaginations, they can never be again quite so narrow in their sympathies, they can recognize and make allowance for temperaments alien to theirs; they begin, dimly, to realize what Hamlet meant when he said: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in *your* philosophy."

Curiously enough, the response to the greatest of them all is never as satisfying. To Sophocles, to Shakespeare, to Goethe the response is noticeably less. Perhaps these great ones are too infinitely remote from them in time and theme, perhaps the youngsters have not yet grown up to them, perhaps it is that these serene spirits, in whom all moods find a synthesis and a home, make less of an immediate impression than these other lesser men each of whom is one mood incarnate.

Don't Be Like That!

This is perhaps all one needs to say for the moment in this matter of temperament. It is more of an obstacle than either Ignorance or Provincialism because you are less conscious of it. Closer to you than breathing, nearer than hands or feet. You cannot change your temperament. But you can educate it, at least you can make it a little less rigid, a little more plastic. You can remember Kipling's leopard that could not change its spots but could learn something about protective coloration.

You can at least remember that if you are to get the most when you tune in, through a book, to a person who is probably richer, wiser, more experienced in temperament than you are—you

will do it only by soft pedaling your own and allowing his to come through, clear, full, and eager to convey his mood to you.

And whether you feel that literature like the sun dial should count only the sunny hours or whether you feel with Mr. Mencken that all great literature is in its very nature tragic, remember that nobody but the King of Hearts (that temperamental creature) ever insisted that the proper method of procedure was "Sentence first, verdict afterward!"

CHAPTER IV

The Obstacle of Intolerance

YOU will remember that Peter the Fisherman —this was long before he became Saint Peter —was a particularly obstinate and stiff-necked person, who believed that the Gospel was for the Chosen People only and that the followers of Jesus should have no truck with Gentiles.

In the tenth chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles you can see how he was reformed.

> "And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to earth:
>
> Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
>
> And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.
>
> But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice speake unto him the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common.
>
> And this was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven."

So Peter baptized Cornelius the Centurion and,

later, said, "God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

This little text on dogmatic intolerance applies almost equally well to literature. And this chapter on Intolerance follows logically on the heels of that on Temperament, for Intolerance is basically a matter of temperament, disguised, even to the victim of it, as righteous conviction. Unchecked temperament eventually and unescapably breeds intolerance. Its only check is the deliberate attempt to be reasonably unprejudiced.

This check of cool reason Samuel Butler calls Laodiceanism, (see Revelation: 3:14-16), the gospel of blowing neither too hot or too cold, the gospel of the reasonable mean.

The Corrective of Philosophy

Most of us are obsessed with the notion that there is only one true way of looking at life and that we must, on pain of death, find that way. Church and school alike have implanted that notion in us almost too deep to be eradicated. We have come, most of us, to take for granted, as beyond question, certain virtues and their contrary vices: democracy vs. aristocracy; individualism vs. socialism; complacency vs. pessimism; belief vs. agnosticism; action vs. reflection; intuition vs. reason—and so on. These go to make up

our collective American temperament, what we are pleased to call our "idealism."

Other temperamental notions which do not jibe with ours we consider not alternative idealisms but heresies. And never for a moment do most of us stop to consider that idealisms and heresies alike are primarily emotional and, therefore, dogmatic. Each of them had its beginning in a strong temperament, a congenital unescapable way of looking at life.

Every boy and every gal, says the private in "Iolanthe," who's born into this world alive, is either a little liberal, or else a little conservative. These ways of looking at life are bolstered up with reason and logic, syllogisms, analogies, historical precedents, dogmas and revelations until they seem utterly authoritative. The more utterly authoritative they seem, the more, one would think, a reasonable person would distrust them. For to him each should clearly reveal itself as only the way in which one kind of temperament draws his picture of the world. Sanguine, choleric, atrabilious, phlegmatic—the ancient humours still predetermine our thinking.

There is no more interesting spectacle than to watch a person, not necessarily a young person, educated as most of us have been without the corrective of the objective attitude, suddenly con-

fronted in rapid succession, as in Will Durant's "The Story of Philosophy," with all the contradictory theoretical patterns of the universe and our moral world drawn from age by age by the great philosophers.

Idealism and Materialism, Stoicism and Epicureanism, Pyrrhonism and Scholasticism, Pessimism and Positivism, Transcendentalism and Realism—these names stand, after all, only for clean-cut temperaments that have nothing in common. The lazy intelligence will give it all up as a bad job. The rigid intelligence will, only too often, be confirmed in its rigidity. But the selective intelligence will survey and compare and choose. He will choose that which best nourishes his own personality.

We call that Pragmatism, for Pragmatism is not a philosophy but a method of choosing among all the available philosophies. It merely says that the human mind is not so physically constituted as to be able to recognize which, if any, of all the beliefs is objectively true. It can merely make an affirmation, say: this seems to suit me, this seems to be my truth. He is a Pragmatist, for his is the "pragtical" philosophy.

Tender and Tough

William James the great American philosopher

who gave this attitude of mind its name, divided roughly all temperaments into two, Tender-minded and Tough-minded.

The tender-minded is the person who, literally, cannot bear to listen to what he (or, as often, she) considers wrong. His intellectual skin is so thin that it bleeds and festers when pricked with "false doctrine." This person will either argue passionately, in the outraged tone of one whose holy of holies is being violated, or will, like the ostrich, hide his head in what he considers a closed question. I have many a time at a lecture had to deal with an auditor who resented even a description of a heresy, considering that I was doing him the unjustifiable injury of attempting to convert him. Or if such a one is silent you can usually tell him by the set of his shoulders as he rises to leave the accursed place.

The other, the tough-minded, can stand any amount of intellectual surgery without wincing. He will often argue your head off but he keeps his own. And his temper. He is curious, experimental, judgmatic. He may be born that way—happy man!—or he may, in agony, have fought his way out of his dogmas and earned the right to be called reasonable. He recognizes, with Andrew Undershaft, that "every man has his one true re-

ligion, but not all men have the same one true religion."

All controversies about conduct exhibit only these two types in opposition. Those who have set up a high and fast ideal or standard of perfection and insist that all men must be made to conform to it. And those who, dispassionately measuring man, try to find an experimental working blueprint of a limited ideal, adapted to imperfect humanity and easily to be changed if experience shows the need of change. With Edmund Burke they recognise that "if a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it . . . and they who persist in opposing this mighty current in human affairs will appear . . . not resolute and firm but perverse and obstinate."

There are many aspects of this kind of tender-minded intolerance. There are those who will admit no detail of error to mar the perfect whole. I have known, as I said before, a student to tear out and burn one play out of a splendid collection of plays because for him it ruined the whole. I have known a Catholic woman to assert in writing that Hugo's "Les Miserables" should not be allowed to circulate because of one slurring reference to the Virgin which, for her, blasted the whole of that great epic of applied Christianity.

Such people, finding something they do not like in a writer will often read no further. One of the greatest obstacles to the attempt to evaluate properly Walt Whitman is that many readers, beginning at the beginning, will find his early poems so egotistic and sexual that they close the book forever, although surely some of them would find in "Drum Taps" and the poems of his serene and wise later years much that they could make their own.

A person who disliked Anatole France's "Thais" could not be tempted to try "The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard" or "The Book of My Friend," both of which I am sure would have charmed her. It is almost as if one, disliking the fleshliness of The Song of Songs and the pessimism of Ecclesiastes, should refuse to read the story of Ruth or the Psalms.

To condemn the life work of a writer on the basis of one book, or to condemn even one book, unread, upon hearsay is so manifestly unjust and unintelligent that the point need not be labored.

Dissociating Ideas

Another fruitful cause of intolerance is lack of the ability, or will, to "dissociate ideas." This is a phrase of Remy de Gourmont's, meaning that very often we do not see clearly enough to disen-

tangle the essentials from the inessentials. We linger on the side issues and miss the main points. We praise or condemn, perchance rightly enough, but for the wrong reasons.

A book is not necessarily immoral because it describes indecencies. It is immoral only if the whole intent of the book be to render immorality attractive. I have never been able to see how "Madame Bovary," or "An American Tragedy," can have anything but a most salutary effect, even on the young and impressionable, regardless of its detail, so overwhelming is the tragic effect of the whole. This error is what makes our "bad books" law in Massachusetts so futile. It concentrates on detailed passages and refuses to allow consideration of the whole. On the other hand a book like Richardson's "Pamela" may be profoundly immoral in its effect, not for its detail but for the author's conviction that morality is merely a matter of expedience.

A simple example of failure to dissociate ideas is to be found in the average army officer's sincere conviction that a conscientious objector is fundamentally a coward. He is unable to disentangle the word "coward" from the notion of fear of physical death under fire. Less specialized observers may see that possibly it takes less courage to go to war when everybody is going to war than to

resist the almost unbearable pressure of an inflamed public sentiment. There are people who are able to define patriotism in no other phrase than "My country, right or wrong." These are common examples of the trouble caused by entangling ideas.

Engineering students are inclined to make ribald fun of H. G. Wells on the assumption that he was primarily interested, in "The Time Machine," "When the Sleeper Wakes," "The Food of the Gods," "The First Men in the Moon" and "The War of the Worlds," in describing scientific inventions of the future. They invariably compare him with Jules Verne, ridiculing his flying machines, his death rays and atomic bombs, his cities of the future and pituitary foods. They are incapable of separating the use of imaginative detail from the intended theme or of realizing that every one of Wells's earlier stories is a poetic allegory in which the philosophic idea and not the so-called "invention" is the important thing.

Similarly, I have known earnest readers to reject Bernard Shaw's "Getting Married" as an anarchistic attack on marriage, forgetting, in their horror at the detailed discussion, the conclusion that traditional marriage is after all more satisfactory than any substitutes yet proposed.

In both these cases intolerance results from ignorant and careless reading, from the inability to distinguish theme or argument from the details used in its construction. Literal-mindedness is as common a cause of intolerance as any, for literal-mindedness frequently cannot see the wood for the trees and so tragically misinterprets the author's intention.

Other Causes

The mention of Wells reminds us of another form of intolerance, the conviction that all departure from the norm is not beneficial but dangerous. Mr. Wells has a number of stories illustrating the point that a living organism (as he considers society) will always seek to extrude or destroy the disturbing element. "The Food of the Gods," a parable of the Superman, is one example, "The Country of the Blind," another.

There is a proverb that in the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king. But Mr. Wells knows better. His hero, a man with sight, instead of being welcomed in the country of the blind and trusted, is set upon, hunted down, and killed as a monster mysteriously and dangerously afflicted in a way the blind cannot understand. It is, of course, an allegory of genius, more particularly of imag-

inative genius. The artist knows he is mistrusted for his temperament by people of what might be called "stock" or standard temperaments. The most tender-minded of them will seek to have him outlawed, given the hemlock, crucified. Those who are merely stupid and insensitive will close their ears against him and send him to Coventry. The adult and liberated will listen carefully, will even protect his right to be heard against the dogmatists, will try to understand emotionally as well as intellectually. Then, when they honestly believe they understand, they will feel they have the right to utter their judgment.

There are subjects and points of view on which it is hard not to be intolerant, points of view on which, without being dogmatic, one may feel that the experience of the human race gives results so self evident that it is folly to express others. But even here one must remember that many peoples necessarily obey impulses to which, in the words of Matthew Arnold, we are permitted to remain strangers. It is salutary to remember that "fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong," even if we think we are right.

It is simply a historic fact that the Germanic and Celtic branch of the race, to which belong those of us who are of British descent, have al-

ways insisted on a view of sex differing fundamentally from that of the Latin or Mediterranean peoples. The Jewish point of view, too, has always differed profoundly in such matters from the "humanist" point of view. Between the one, serious, emotional, idealistic and even mystical, and the other, realistic, practical, even inclined to be comic, there is a gulf fixed that is apparently impossible to bridge. The genius of Rabelais, Voltaire, Anatole France is in many respects profoundly alien to us. We can understand far better Shelley's determined and idealistic philosophy of free love than we can France's amused shrug at its obsessions. Such differences make objective criticism difficult.

Furthermore—though here I am treading on dangerous ground—it is doubtful if many women can ever think themselves into an attitude which to most men is a matter of course. And vice versa. To all the theorists who tell us that sex plays no part in thinking, we can only make a matter-of-fact answer. Common sense tells us that nothing plays a greater part. The work of men and women in art and literature is often profoundly different in its very nature. Here if anywhere criticism must be freed of its basic prejudices.

All imaginative literature that seriously criti-

cizes a civilization or a code of conduct needs the most careful handling lest unexamined prejudices are allowed to pass ignorant judgments.

Let me quote a paragraph from a recent investigation made by Teachers College at Columbia of the habits of thinking of our American teachers, habits which the report characterizes as dangerously conservative. These thinking habits are "interwoven with a severe lack of stability, an excessive lack of independence, of reaction manifested by frequent and confused yielding to suggestion, a wide and revealing inconsistency, and an obvious and significant lack of scientific attitude manifested by uncritical reactions along the habit-worn and comfortable lines of tradition and authority."

This checks well enough with the conclusions I had long ago reached from reading the papers on literature handed in to me by teachers. And this explains, unquestionably, the reactions of the average college student trying seriously to deal with literature. You can't blame the student. But who shall teach the teachers?

The Red Herring of Motive

At the bottom of the whole question lies the attitude which is so common and so hopeless.

THE OBSTACLE OF INTOLERANCE

Every one is convinced that his own motives are good and his own integrity unimpeachable. One would think that such knowledge would persuade us to grant without question the courtesy of an equal faith in others. But your genuinely intolerant person cannot get it into his head that other people's motives aren't bad. Behind such wrong headed views, he feels, there must lie motives that will not bear scrutiny.

The simplest accusation is that the modern radical novelist, painter and poet is doing what he does simply because he will make money that way, and therefore that he may be dismissed without ado as mercenary and sordid. A little reflection would convince even such ungenerous people that it is far easier to make money by doing the conventional, popular, imitative thing than by doing the new, radical and unpopular. It is the writer of cash-girl fiction, the painter of colored post cards, the poet of platitudes that makes the big money.

Whenever a person accuses an artist of being mercenary I know that the accuser's entire philosophy of life is rotten with greed. If that is the only spring to action he can understand he stands forever outside the pale where civilized people deal with the finest fruits of civilization. He remains a barbarian.

Do not impute motives! If you cannot understand, or do not like, a work of art, yet can criticize on no other ground than "motive," keep quiet. Every motive you impute reveals only yourself.

Be humble. Remember Mark Twain's unknown hill-billy before whom Shakespeare and Milton bowed in Heaven. Remember that every book, even though it be not "the precious life blood of a master spirit treasured up to a life beyond life," yet does show, the meanest of them, an industry, a concentration, a patience, a capacity for observation, an intensity of feeling, a sympathy with life which you may entirely lack. Writing even fiction is at least as taxing a job as keeping house or running an office.

Be just. Remember Voltaire's words to his great opposite Helvetius: "I do not agree with a word you say, and will defend to the death your right to say it."

Be philosophic. In "The Human Tragedy," a little book by Anatole France, the hero, a Franciscan monk who is tempted by the devil of tolerance, sees in his dream a great wheel, stationary. From center to circumference it is divided into countless strips, each a different color and each bearing a different pronouncement about life. It

is a farrago of opposed creeds and colors. But as the wheel turns, faster and faster, colors melt into one another, the writing blurs, until there is only the spinning, shining circle of pure white, which is the Truth.

All truths, even your own, are only partial truths. And all heresies, even your enemy's, are parts of the Truth as well. Remember that and you can read *everything,* without harm, and even, perhaps, with some profit.

CHAPTER V

The Obstacle of Age

A RECENT writer proposed as the best cure for the ills of democracy the raising of the voting age to thirty. A writer of the Renaissance says as a matter of course that by the time a boy reaches fourteen he should have "killed his man and begotten his man."

Plato in his "Republic" thought that a man should not be allowed to govern until he had reached the age of fifty. That is about the age at which savage tribes and modern employers condemn men to death or starvation as being no longer efficient.

You pays your money and you takes your choice. The Obstacle of Age I am speaking of in this chapter is not the obstacle of old age but the obstacle of any age.

Life vs. Education

A curious paradox presents itself. In every day life we are continuing the natural habits of the past. Youth will be served. The adventurous spirits who commanded troops of horse in Flanders

for Elizabeth and for her singed the beard of the King of Spain were boys with wives and families, yet hardly old enough by our standards to be in college. Our boys and girls of today, ever younger, are breaking our athletic records, flying our planes, adorning pulpit and stage and screen. The college president, corporation executive, movie magnate of thirty has come to stay.

Yet the educational world insists on keeping him a child as long as possible. It is hardly possible for a man to get into professional life before twenty-six. At twenty he is at least four years behind his fellow in Germany or France. For the first ten years of his educational life he is eased along, spoon-fed, encouraged to "express himself," taught little, disciplined less, and kept to the pace of the slowest in the class. Most of them have seldom been pushed to the limit of their capacities. They have been allowed to "get by" until the habit becomes almost ineradicable.

Worst of all, from the point of view of this book, their reading and thinking, except for a small number of "classics" used as texts in preparation for entrance examinations, have been allowed to remain too youthful. They have not grappled with books of ideas; they have not been exposed to the contagion of many great works of the imagination. For their collateral, "outside"

reading they have often been allowed to choose recent books of only ephemeral interest, of no permanent value. Teachers, themselves the products of the same system, have only too often discouraged pupils from reading books which run any risk of being considered too difficult, too adult, too controversial, or too "dangerous." The result is that the college teacher of literature has little to build on, has to start at the bottom doing what should have been done in high school, before he can even attempt to discuss literature as an adult with adults.

Many of them never learn how to read like a mature person. They may mature in body and mind, in experience, in business ability, in management of family and career, but they remain adolescent in their reading tastes and this adolescence colors all their thinking and their imagination.

Aging Adolescents

But even if they learn to read properly the literature of the past and of their day, there is another paradox. We are confronted with the phenomenon of aging people, people of middle age and even more, who keep young in everything but the imagination. They keep themselves bodily fit, they go in for sports at what used to be considered an advanced age, they dress youthfully and play

youthfully, they are the youngest crowd of parents and grandparents any age has ever seen—but they cannot realize that time passes, ideas change, philosophies shift, and imaginative literature evolves constantly.

They have learned to orient themselves to the literature of their younger days and to that of an earlier generation as they were taught it in school. But if they live through a generation like ours, when changes in ideas and in art have been so rapid and so violent, they cannot, apparently, keep supple their mental and imaginative muscles as well as their physical and social muscles. And, too often, they will refuse to take the exercises in reading which will keep them supple.

Of course, ignorance, provincialism and intolerance play some part in this state of affairs, but age plays more. Our deepest impressions are those of our youth. Our powers of assimilating new ways stiffen as time passes. The mind and imagination stiffens as well, without our knowing it. Only too often we place the blame for our growing crankiness about the new and experimental on the incomprehensible vagaries of the object instead of, as we should, on the lack of response in the subject. Doctors consider the lack of the "knee jerk" response a bad sign.

I once met an elderly gentlewoman, highly cul-

tivated, not merely intellectual but intelligent, who told me that after hearing a lecture of mine on "The World of the Modern Novel," she had resigned as "reader" for her public library. She had suddenly realized, she said, that she was too hopelessly far out of sympathy and understanding with recent literature to do it justice. She was, of course, one in a thousand and for that reason far too valuable for a library to lose. So I told her. Most people of her years go on the assumption that theirs was the golden age and that the times wax evil.

Henry Adams and His Education

This difficulty so many people feel themselves in about the literature and art of the past twenty years is exactly that which makes "The Education of Henry Adams" such a profoundly instructive book. Henry Adams, the Harvard historian, friend of John Hay and Lodge and Roosevelt, was impelled by a personal loneliness and an irresistible intellectual curiosity to spend the latter part of his life in the vain search for a formula which should explain past history and the discoveries of the present. He had come to the conclusion that with the discovery of radium in 1900 a new era for mankind had begun. He set himself

to find the law of this new era and was baffled. He laid the blame on his "education."

He was born in the eighteen-thirties, which means that he was educated by teachers who had received their own training in their impressionable youth, around, say, the end of the eighteenth century. He was therefore, steeped in the ideas of a century past. In his early twenties he found Lyell's "Geology" and had sense enough to recognize that it exploded much of what he had been taught was the pattern of the universe. He set himself to keep abreast of contemporary thought, with Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and the rest. But when in his later years he had to deal with the new physics he knew himself in a world for which his earlier education had given him no key. Radium nearly finished him. Einstein and Eddington might have given him what he was looking for, but he died before their day, a hopeless seeker in a world which he knew he could never understand.

There is an example in the grand manner of what must happen. The dead hand of the past lies heavy on us all. Every age is an age of transition. Enthusiastic young people, weakly grounded in the past, hail as a renaissance what elder people, little experienced in the present, deplore as a decadence.

Neither of them see that renaissance and decadence are obverse and reverse of the same medal. The past inevitably grows over-ripe, decays, and litters the ground above which, already, the new buds are starting. Often the good in the past goes with the evil but only to make room for a new good and a different evil. It is so hard to recognize a new good as good.

This is profoundly true of the literature of any two succeeding generations. Literature, art, philosophy are only stamps which one generation presses upon the flowing river of Time. Men of genius in each generation stamp it with their own collective image and loyal human nature strives to keep the outline sharp upon the flux.

Reactionaries would turn the river back if they could to an earlier stamp; conservatives would have time stand still to preserve the stamp they love and are accustomed to; youth would hasten the flow in order to obliterate the only partly defaced stamp with a new one. Only the wise man will let the river run as it must and try to learn from one stamp as it succeeds another. For this Turgenev wrote "Fathers and Sons."

Human nature has an inexhaustible capacity for assimilation. It is not necessary to reject the old entirely if one is to receive the new. So many

people feel, envisaging the old and new in art, that they must make the choice of Hercules. Tennyson knew better. "Though much is taken, much abides," although elsewhere he admits that "the old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills himself in various ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world." Tennyson is out of fashion now, but he was mystic enough to understand this.

I Give Myself Away

But I did not intend to use this chapter to criticize my elders and betters. I am getting that way myself. I can not give undivided allegiance to the later James Joyce. Gertrude Stein leaves me cold. e. e. cummings makes me hold my head despairingly. D. H. Lawrence makes me smile in ways he did not intend, and Aldous Huxley gives me the cold shivers at times. The annual "Caravan" and the quarterly "transition" make me angry in spite of myself.

We are to be pitied a little, we aging ones. Our contempt is mingled with a little fear; our ridicule has in spite of itself a note of uncertainty; our incredulity sometimes fails us and we believe the worst.

But there is an ignorance, a provincialism, an

intolerance of youth which is in the saddle today. The "pleasant insolence" of youth, of which Masefield speaks, is more insolent today and not so pleasant. I am speaking not of the helpless products of the school system but of those who should know better. Of the critics who write as if nothing written before 1900 matters. Of the young intellectuals of France who danced on the grave of Anatole France. Of the young intellectuals of England who refer to Shaw and Wells and Galsworthy and Chesterton as old dodderers who no longer count.

Because they know nothing of the past they hail as original works of art and literature which are no more original than green trees in the spring. With Henry Ford they believe that history is bunk; with the Behaviorists, that criticism of literature is as much a product of the thyroid gland as literature itself. Out of old orthodoxies they cut snippets and patch them together in anarchic patterns they call revolutionary programs. Because they are virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale; because they are drunkards there shall be no more milk and bread!

There! Having got rid of that bit of aged and provincial intolerance, I can resume my plea for flexibility. Suffice it to remember that in matters

of literature and philosophy a birth date too near may be as great a liability as a birth date too long ago. As we grow let us not be too sure of progress, and as we decay let us not be too certain of decadence.

A Constructive Suggestion

One suggestion only I have. I am inclined to think that our educational habit of starting young folks off with the literature of the far away and long ago, and working slowly down towards the present, is not a wise one. Often we never arrive there. Many schools still know nothing of English literature since Kipling and nothing of American since the Civil War. There are dozens of colleges whose faculties in literature do not recognize the twentieth century at all.

Many young people have acquired through Shakespeare's plays and Milton's minor poems and Addison's essays and Burke's speeches such a thorough-going hatred of literature that they can never be won back to it. Many cannot understand why all the time should be given to English literature to the neglect of American. The average youngster in high school, even although his historical imagination may to a certain extent have been stimulated by the moving pictures, can make

little of poetry or prose born out of the circumstances of a past age in a foreign country, written in an alien idiom and an unfamiliar vocabulary. Thinking, writing, speaking the American language, how can the word patterns of Jacobean England be to him anything but a hindrance and a torment? And taught by teachers to whom, like as not, they are as much of a torment.

The remedy is obvious. Begin with the serious American literature since 1900, the only generation these children intuitively understand. Something of present day English writing if you like. Then work back to the American literature since the Civil War, which their mothers and fathers can remember and dramatize for them. Then the Victorians in England.

By that time the student will be ready and eager to go on, or rather to go back further, or it will be obvious that all literature is lost on him and there should be no further waste of time, money and energy in that particular field. But if he fails, at least he fails under the most just and reasonable system. One can be sure of him, as one can not be at all sure today when a boy or girl finds the ancients intolerable and withdraws like a tortoise into the shell. Those born to literature will go ahead, reaching the more and more remote, and

consequently more difficult, as they mature, and finding always that the present helps far better to understand the past than the past does the present.

This program, I believe, is more and more being put into effect. At least there was a time, fifteen years ago, when college teachers felt they should do more with contemporary literature, because the youngsters had been given nothing. The interest in teaching contemporary literature has spread and spread, however, so that today we find our high school products fairly well grounded in certain aspects, chiefly poetry and drama, so that much of what we try to do is only repetition. But of knowledge of the literature of the past we find hardly more than a trace.

I hope, and I venture to prophesy, that in the future the teaching of the literature of the past will be almost entirely confined to the college, where it belongs.

Here Endeth —

With this I end the first main section of this book: the obstacles to intelligent reading. You will, of course, have perceived by this time that all these obstacles, of ignorance, of provincialism, of temperament, of intolerance, of age are only allotropic forms of one great obstacle: Egoism.

The first approach to reading is to de-centralize yourself, to become Copernican instead of Ptolemaic. The mother who remarked proudly that they were all out of step but Jim was simply expressing something that most of us never dare let climb into the upper level of our consciousness. We suppress it, try to be unconscious of it, pretend it's not there. But there it is, and it plays havoc with intelligent and fruitful reading.

Now, if you think you know how (and why) to discount yourself, I want to go ahead to help you discount the Critic.

Part III

THE CRITIC AND THE WRITER

CHAPTER VI

The Function of Criticism

WHAT is the use of "criticism"? asks the student.

Criticism is simply the exercise of that faculty which keeps us from going mad with bewilderment in an apparently accidental and contradictory world. Its business is to make maps, charts, scales and tables. It records, describes, classifies and compares. It tries to arrive at values. This involves a constant revaluation of values and, sometimes, a transvaluation of values, *i.e.*, an attempt to get outside current values altogether and to look at them afresh.

The criticism of current events we call History, of the tangle of human relationships Sociology, of natural phenomena Science, of the mysteries of life Philosophy or Theology. In primitive times of little knowledge these forms of criticism are simple systems easily to be comprehended. The more we know, the more chaotic the world and universe seem, the more complex and subtle and difficult must criticism become.

Even imaginative literature, fiction and poetry and drama, is implicit criticism, for no imaginative literature is worth while that is not also a chart of life. "The Book of Job" is, in its way, as much criticism as the "Summa Theologiae" of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Goethe's "Faust" is, in its way, as much criticism as Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason," Hardy's "The Dynasts" as Spencer's "First Principles." The only difference is that the second group of writings are formal statements of ideas while the first are emotional pictures of life in action from which you must formulate your own conclusions.

Many people find themselves in difficulties with "Job" or "Faust" or "Peer Gynt" because they are not able to take the final step of disentangling the ideas from the story. The "theme" and the "fable" are not the same thing. Nevertheless, it is precisely this intense expression of ideas in imaginative form that gives us what we call "great" literature. It is what Matthew Arnold means when he calls poetry (meaning all imaginative literature) "a criticism of life." This criticism must contain two things: Analysis, the lesser criticism which takes things apart to see what they are made of and what makes the wheels go round; and Synthesis, the greater criticism, which puts them to-

gether again, finds the pattern in them and explains what they mean.

Literary criticism, therefore, is only criticism of criticism, merely an attempt to decide whether a particular piece of writing was worth doing and was done well. But if it exhibits an interesting temperament playing skillfully upon other temperaments, this dealing at two removes from life may in itself be memorable literature. One may receive more fine enjoyment from a brilliant critic than from the mediocre poet he is amusing himself with.

But reading a critic for pleasure, as one would watch a gymnast or a display of fireworks, is not the same thing as reading a critic to correct or justify your own ideas about a work. That is why so many readers become either enraged at the critic or discouraged about themselves. They cannot seem to get at his springs of action, what makes him think as he does. Worse still, if there be two at variance. When doctors disagree. . . .

Is criticism a science and is one, therefore, to write himself down as an ass for disagreeing with the critic? Or is one to think that his own notions are just as good as those of the best critic that ever flayed a poet? Or are there critics and criticasters, and how does one tell them apart?

Let us look briefly at certain varieties.

The Ghost of Samuel Johnson

There did exist once a kind of criticism which set up an absolute standard, bludgeoned the individual reader into passive acceptance, and reduced individual response to the minimum. That kind is for the moment completely out of fashion. It dominated even English literature from Queen Anne to Victoria's accession. It came to England from France. It originated in a misreading by Roman critics of the Greek Aristotle. It was the basis of mediaeval and renaissance criticism.

It was always a contradiction of the English genius, and our greatest men of letters always went their own way without regard to it. But from Dryden to the men who broke Keats's heart it controlled English letters. Addison was a liberal and Samuel Johnson an illiberal and dogmatic interpreter. One or two young Englishmen are now trying to revive it.

The idea was that the Greek and Latin classics had been the supreme and perfect expression of life in literature. The rules of their writing were to be found in Aristotle (though, as a matter of fact, Aristotle only described a method, not prescribed *the* method), in Horace and the later Roman rhetoricians. Ancient literature was not only correct, it was the only correct literature.

"To copy nature is to copy them," sang Alexander Pope of the classic poets.

Imitation of the ancients was not merely the sincerest flattery, it was the only passport to critical acceptance. That is why the eighteenth century forgot Chaucer and strongly criticized Shakespeare. Voltaire called him a drunken barbarian because the Elizabethan had neither the spirit nor the technic of the little French tragic poets who copied Racine who had copied Seneca who had copied Sophocles. Samuel Johnson was very dubious about him and strongly preferred the cold and formal "Cato" of Addison of which his own "Irene" was such a stodgy imitation.

The theory of imitation involved not merely the spirit and philosophy of the ancients—what might be called the strategy—but every little detail of method—the tactics. The rimed couplet of Pope was the only admitted form of poetry. I once looked at a volume of Harvard class poems, 1810-1830, when the Romantic movement was at its richest. They were all imitations of the "Essay on Man." So strong was the tradition that even the Romantics had difficulty in breaking the spell. They simply changed models, that was all. Where Johnson in his drama imitated Seneca and Addison, Shelley and Browning imitated Shakespeare.

Literature was judged almost entirely with ref-

LOS ANGELES MUSEUM
EXPOSITION PARK

erence to the success or non-success of its imitation of the manner and method of the past. It believed it was being classic; it succeeded, we believe today, in being only pseudo-classic.

During that age the reader was absolutely sure. He had no doubts. The greatest of critics, Dryden, Addison, Johnson, built a critical model by which the reader might test all new literature. In Newton's physical world, Burke's political world, and Johnson's literary world the anxious amateur thinker might live with perfect security.

This, as you can see, was only one example of what we have spoken of before as tender-mindedness, the reliance on dogma, authority, form and pattern, the insistence that the ideal thing is superior to the human spirit.

As serious literary criticism this method is for the time being discarded. I cannot help feeling, however, from a good deal of what I observe of current non-professional criticism of modern poetry, drama and fiction, that it survives in spirit in a good many of our schools and colleges. There is undoubtedly a feeling abroad that nineteenth century technic is good enough to make any radical changes not merely unnecessary but ridiculous and harmful. Wherever you find that attitude you will find the ghost of Samuel Johnson pontificating.

The Adventures of the Soul

As strongly opposed to this attitude as is humanly possible is the method, if one can call it a method, in vogue today. Its best known priest was probably Anatole France who in his four delightful volumes, "The Literary Life," practiced the theory of the treatment of literature which he called "the adventures of the soul among masterpieces." It was as completely a subjective and personal method as the other was in theory objective and impersonal. It went on the assumption that the critic, a unique, was dealing with the writer, also a unique. Literature, it decided, was a matter of temperament and intuition. A personal taste, raised above whim by catholic reading and wide comparative knowledge, is brought to bear on a piece of literature, without regard to the patterns of the past. Has the writer done successfully what he set out to do? is the major question. Was it worth doing? is a minor question, sometimes not asked at all. In the hands of Anatole France, a man of strong temperament and very tenacious notions in the matters of taste, there were, as a matter of fact, exact criteria, however blandly and unobtrusively insinuated, sufficient to rule out Emile Zola and Georges Ohnet, which gave France's critical works a unified and consistent

aesthetic. In other hands, of course, the method might make for anarchism.

This method is in the saddle today. Nine tenths of our current literary criticism in America, particularly in the hands of our admirable Crichtons the newspaper columnists, is hardly more than an expression of a personal preference which admits gleefully that not merely temperament and intuition but glands, digestion, and the morning-after hang-over play their right and unescapable part in criticism. Aesthetics as a method hardly exists for these playboys. Tradition does not count, for so many of the critics have never read anything but the works of their most recent contemporaries. There is a tendency to hail as revolutionary and original various notions and bits of technic which were old when Quintilian was a pup. There is a tendency to be emotionally overimpressed by mere competence or freshness. There are too many superlatives. The columnist critic and the professional writer of publisher's blurbs for book jackets are often indistinguishable.

Playboys and Professionals

Such critics need bother no serious reader. His standards are as good as theirs any day of the week. But there is a more serious and competent

aspect of the same thing. When Mr. Mencken praises what he calls the Goethe-Croce-Spingarn theory, and practices it, he is advocating a critical method which is at bottom the Anatole France method. It is, first of all, serious; it is an attempt to formulate an aesthetic, or theory of beauty in art, which is personal and subjective, which admits that the personality of the critic is as important as the personality of the writer and that a piece of criticism is as surely a piece of creative art as a poem or picture. But it differs from the work of the playboys in being based on wide comparative knowledge of past and present literatures, English speaking and foreign. It seeks to weed out notions merely faddist, of the day, from fundamentals; it gives due weight to the spirit of the age while recognizing that of earlier ages. It rules out formal requirements, both in technic and in ethics; it allows the artist enormous freedom to function as freely as he may, yet it holds to certain basic requirements as to form which rule out ruthlessly all the mere anarchists and nihilists.

But when this serious criticism borrows the manner and the idiom of the columnists the reader is often in a quandary. He seems not able to distinguish between the form and the matter. To use examples of the day, the fact that Mr. George

Jean Nathan is accustomed to use a riotously funny and vulgar method of expression often keeps people from realizing that he is one of our most serious and scholarly critics, incorrigibly an individualist on the foundation of an encyclopaedic knowledge of the theatre ancient and modern. Mr. Mencken's extravagances of expression often hide an equally solid and scholarly aesthetic of criticism, which is worth serious consideration. And so on.

The reader must give up such certainties as the eighteenth century reader enjoyed, but it should not be hard for him to choose critics who will really nourish and guide him out of the welter of individualists. He can easily eliminate the witty, readable commentator, the man-about-town or the former prize-fight reporter, and take his comments on books exactly as seriously as he takes those of a quick-witted and superficial friend.

He can eliminate those whom Ernest Boyd in an unforgettable essay once called "Aesthete; 1924 Model"; the writer who discards the past, pants eagerly after all the latest literary programs and inventions, takes the Chaplin film and the vaudeville comic, jazz, and the circus with tremendous seriousness, interprets all literature in terms of the mother complex and the thyroid gland, or digs up nearly forgotten third-raters of

the past and ballyhoos them into best sellers. These are in their way informative. They will tell us a good deal about the taste and the ideas and the aesthetic of the day, though seldom in relation to that of the past. Learn all you can about the literature and art of the moment, even of the most trivial sort, but leave it to other writers to put it in its frame for you. For the only criticism worthy of the name is comparative criticism, that fits the details of the day into a whole.

How to Choose Your Critic

Whom you will follow—for you will unescapably follow somebody—will depend a good deal on your temperament. He, this modern subjective critic, will probably not offer you a hard and fast program by which to praise and damn. But he will show you unmistakably where he stands, offer you a consistent and seasoned point of view, illuminate it on all sides with reference to past and present, local and European literatures, all the while admitting generously that tastes vary, that there is no arbitrary right and wrong in literature, that there are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays (as Kipling sang), and that many more of them than we like to think are right!

You will choose your temperament and learn from him. The erudite, fastidious, sceptical,

classically minded Anatole France, the cool, sensible, ironic Arnold Bennett, Mr. Mencken wielding the axe and Mr. Nathan the seltzer siphon with gay healthy energy and earnestness, Dr. Canby a bit didactically, Aldous Huxley more ponderous than he need be, the too sensitive Ludwig Lewisohn, Joel Spingarn himself, and a number of lesser people.

All these writers agree on the fundamentals. Every writer can be only himself. It is folly to expect him to be otherwise; it is presumptuous to compare him with some one to whom he is not comparable; it is criminal to try to prevent him from functioning in his own way as an artist. The business of the critic, with all the learning at his command, is to make the reader feel what he (the critic) is able to find in the writer. His business is to describe, to analyse, to illustrate and compare. He should make the reader *feel* the writer. As a catalyzer, a master of ceremonies, he should bring the two together, pointing out qualities admirable and not so admirable, leaving the two at the last together for a love affair or a quarrel. Incidentally, his criticism will be, itself, a poem.

Many critics will be as antipathetic to you as many writers are. But you can choose your critics as you choose your friends, finding in them qualities which match yours or at least do not antago-

nize yours, but which also supplement yours, so that your friend may also be your guide and philosopher. For this kind of criticism is a philosophy. It is not mere eclecticism. It teaches the philosophy of Peter's dream, that the things which books and men have in common are more important than the things which differentiate them.

This method, so rich and human and tolerant at its best, does without question lend itself too easily to the libertines and the lunatic fringe of literature. It lends itself, likewise, to those who believe in what is called "art for art's sake." This phrase, the symbol of an attitude intended to defend literature against the inquisitors and witch hunters of a puritan state, means that imaginative literature must be judged purely as an experiment in aesthetics, the attempt of an adult temperament to make an interesting and beautiful expression that will in itself please and interest other adult temperaments. It should not be judged politically, sociologically, educationally, or medically. Its possible influence on adolescents, feeble minded persons, fools, or reformers is not the chief consideration. It flourished as a cult in Europe in the latter third of the century. It meant, said Oscar Wilde, that no book should be considered either "moral" or "immoral," only well written or badly

written. Although that statement and its author has never been forgiven, the general belief expressed so characteristically has, on the whole and with reservations, been accepted by civilized people, the belief that the business of art is not primarily to urge a local or temporal idealism, neither to enforce an orthodoxy nor suppress a heresy.

The Humanists Enter a Caveat

There is nevertheless a strong and able school of critics who hold the fort of what they call "classicism" or "humanism" against the assaults of "naturalism" or "relativism"—in short of art for the sake of art. They are strongly intrenched in the elder faculties of our colleges, although the younger men who are rapidly succeeding them seem to believe more in the newer fashions. These humanists are the lineal and legitimate descendants of the old dogmatists. They have abandoned any defence of the orthodoxy of form, in the old sense, although they still hammer valiantly at what they consider the vulgarities, indecencies and extravagances of the idiom and form of the day.

They stand together in their fundamentals, although they differ in their emphases. They all feel that the old order, in which a literature of decorum, restraint, balance, common sense, idealism,

and gentility expressed a civilization that believed in God, immortality, meliorism, teleology, authority, and consistency, is fundamentally better for man than the dominant literature or philosophy of today.

You will find this expressed in Paul Elmer More's long list of "Shelburne Essays," our finest American expression of the greatness and sufficiency of the literatures of the past. Irving Babbitt's books "The New Laokoön" and "Rousseau and the Romantic Movement" express the idea that the eighteenth century knew an orderly and sane view of life which Rousseau working through revolution and romanticism destroyed, and that in consequence nineteenth century literature is progressively a madhouse of unregulated individualism. Bliss Perry in "A Study of Prose Fiction," now some years old, with its disapproving reflections upon a school of fiction then in its nonage, belongs here. Stuart Sherman's "On Contemporary Literature" stresses the painful contrast between man as evolved animal, viewed by France and Wells and Dreiser, with man as a little lower than the angels, as shown by Hugo and George Eliot and Tolstoi. For a time Sherman was inclined, like William Jennings Bryan, to lay it all to German atheism, but after he had left the University of Illinois for a New York newspaper, he

became amazingly tolerant and willing to try anything once. He was among the ablest, and certainly the most readable of our conservative critics, and his early death was one of our greatest losses. The late Brander Matthews naturally belonged here, as did William Dean Howells when he was alive. Miss Agnes Repplier and Mrs. Gerould wear their rue with a difference, tending to deplore the breaking down of the standards of old American gentility under the pressure of vulgar immigrants whose standards of culture can hardly, at least in Philadelphia and Princeton, be called standards at all.

These are the people who furnish the scholarship and the arguments for the inarticulate thousands who know only that they "do not like thee, Dr. Fell." All are conservative in the best sense of the word, some are reactionary. All are foemen worthy of the steel of the innovators.

Criticism and Original Sin

What is the rock bottom difference between these two points of view? As I see it, this. Those who feel that it is the critic's business to introduce you to literature and let it go at that are those who trust life and trust people. They have a strong philosophical sense. They know there are other solar systems than ours, other civilizations,

and other ethics. The history of mankind gives them no confidence in those systems that man makes up out of his own head and calls religions and moral codes and the like, at best too weak, at worst too strong. They trust that man is inherently decent and that his acts and expressions are naturally wholesome. They approve of Rabelais's motto over the Abbey of Theleme, "Do what thou wilt," because, as Rabelais intimates, folks can be trusted on the whole to behave.

If this be true, literature can be trusted. People do not have to be protected from it. As they are a bit slow-witted in recognizing values, these need to be pointed out for the intensification of their pleasure. But they should be left to themselves to decide whether a particular book is their particular meat or their individual poison.

On the other hand, the Humanists, however emancipated theologically, do subscribe at bottom to the notion that man is sinful and not to be trusted. They reason with Edmund Burke that man has a right to be protected against himself—by those whose superior education, breeding and strength of character fit them to protect him. Those writers who depict life as an ordered, reasonable, self-controlled, idealistic affair are, therefore, to be preferred to those who depict it as a heartbreaking tangle of perplexities, im-

pulses, experiments and instincts. They believe that the doctrine of sin and repentance is healthier for man than one which denies the fact of sin.

When Meredith says "The light of the soul burns upward. Let us allow for atmospheric disturbance," they believe the candle would be safer for a screen of thou-shalt-nots. When Wells cries exultantly "The soul survives its adventures," they still tend to answer "the wages of sin is death."

You pays your money and you takes your choice! But is that the only way out?

Both are intelligent. Both are sincere and in earnest. Both can put up an argument staggeringly persuasive.

How to decide? Not by compromise, which always is weaker than either side alone, but by resolution of forces, the vectorial sum of two opposed strengths, out of which comes a directed force stronger than either.

Out of these contradictions you will make your truth.

Warning Against Critics

One warning, though, against *all critics*. They are sedentary people whose chief interest is books. Usually they do not so much do things as read about people doing things. "He who can does, he

who cannot teaches," said Bernard Shaw. Similarly he who can does (or writes), he who cannot criticizes. He is dealing with literature at second hand and with life at third hand. This makes a difficulty.

Most of us judge a book in terms of our own activities and experiences. This is often dangerous, as I have pointed out, but at least it gives a real, however narrow, basis for judgment. But your dyed-in-the-wool critic has no experiences save those in books. He comes to live, as it were, under a glass bell in an atmosphere purely of the imagination. He does not correct his books by his living. Hence he cannot take as seriously as we do unproved or extreme philosophies, wild experiments in conduct, extremes of nihilism or idealism such as we others tend to correct by experience. To him all experience is after all only literary experience and does not matter. But we are always afraid lest life and letters will wed and that the offspring will be a changeling. If we see black and white in life we cannot help seeing black and white in literature. But in his literary twilight all cats are gray.

The critic knows this himself and pretends to be one of us. Hazlitt tramping about England and fraternizing with prize-fighters, Anatole France and Oscar Wilde being men of the world, Stuart

Sherman leaving academic shades for Park Row, Mr. Heywood Broun playing hard at poker and Mr. Woollcott at parlor games—all are trying to come out of the ivory tower and be regular fellows. But it won't work. To a professional critic all books must in the long run be equally valuable or valueless, that is, they must replace life. When Oscar Wilde said that life imitates literature he was giving away the critic's secret.

That is why we must take all professional criticism with a grain of salt.

CHAPTER VII

What Is a Classic?

WHEN it comes to modern criticism of modern books the average reader usually feels that he can take it or leave it. But what is he to think of something called "classic," which he finds highly praised by the "experts" in literature but which he finds intolerable in the reading? What is a classic, after all?

Newspaper writers have a habit of taking a word of limited technical meaning and making it universal by blurring it. "Classic" in our newspapers is coming to mean an important sport event which has been occurring regularly for a number of years. The Harvard-Yale football game and crew race, the B. A. A. Marathon run, the Indianapolis motor race are classics. The Dempsey-Tunney fight was not a classic when it was fought though it may become one in retrospect, *i.e.,* a single memorable event.

This use of the word gives us some clues to the popular conception. The idea of the past, of something with continuing life, something important, something great numbers of people are

interested in because it is unique or noteworthy—all this does almost as well for a work of literature as for a foot race.

Yet in popular talk about literature the word is used even more loosely. To many people a classic work is anything ancient. Unfortunately, to most of our young people anything is ancient which occurred before 1775. But if the word is restricted to works written any time before the fall of Rome, you will have one loose definition.

To others, classic means not-romantic. A classic work of literature, regardless of when it was written, displays the temper of the Greek and Roman literatures before 300 B. C.; that is, it is reasonable instead of intuitive, restrained instead of extravagant, orderly instead of confused, and so on. This is purely a notion of technical criticism which I will deal with later in Chapter IX and is not a meaning in common use, though occasionally an erudite sports writer will compare Mr. Tunney's "classic" style, meaning no compliment, to the more spectacular methods of Mr. Dempsey.

On the whole our sport writers are on the right track. A classic is normally a work of literature written in the past, the qualities of which are notable enough to have kept it alive in the memory of later generations or centuries as an example of excellence.

Vitamines for Classics

What keeps a classic alive? First, and most important, the continuing delight from age to age on the part of nearly everybody who reads. Homer's "Odyssey," "The Arabian Knights," "Hamlet," "Robinson Crusoe," "The Decameron," "Pickwick Papers," "Huckleberry Finn," "Cyrano de Bergerac," "Alice in Wonderland." These are the real classics, about which nothing need be said. They explain themselves. Here the black-balls are so very few, proportionately, and so unimportant.

Second, critical tradition. Certain works, although beyond the easy comprehension or ready liking of most readers, have been judged by the experts as of paramount historical importance or of enormous significance in content or form. These are the works which so many go aground on, led astray by heavy critical authority, and ask pathetically, "what does it mean to me?" The "Bacchae" of Euripides, the "Niebelungenlied," "The Divine Comedy" of Dante, "The Faery Queen," Racine's tragedies, the second part of Goethe's "Faust" (although even the first part is beyond the reach of many), "The Ring and the Book," and so on. These are indisputable classics in every good sense, but one sad experience with

any of them may serve to blacken the fame of all the rest for many a timid reader. Eminent works not of the imagination also belong here: Plato's "Republic," More's "Utopia," Smith's "The Wealth of Nations," Darwin's "Origin of Species," Burke's "French Revolution," and the like.

Third, in the list of influences that keep a book alive, very influential and most puzzling, are the violent enthusiasms of the appreciative few. Here a strong individualist so loves a strong individualist that he wishes everyone else to love him too. Each generation finds a few ardent teachers and disciples and the torch is handed on. Petronius, Villon, Lyly, Donne, Blake, Peacock, Stendhal, Mallarmé, Melville, and so on. These will always be caviare to the general but often their fame shines more brightly than many of greater attainments simply because they have been so fortunate in their worshippers and interpreters. A lesser man may be lifted even into eminence by his friends, witness Samuel Johnson.

These, then, are the three varieties. There are Major or Minor classics, those indisputably great in theme and influence, written often in what can only be described as the grand manner, and those small personal, perfect little works that wake, like the dead grandparents in "The Blue Bird," when someone thinks of them. Those of the second class

that so often lie dusty on the shelves are nearly always major classics, "The Divine Comedy," "Paradise Lost," "The Faery Queen." The little minor classics of the third class are read more than you think. Even the most popular are indisputably minor, Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyyat," "The Vicar of Wakefield," "Candide," "The Shropshire Lad."

Give a Dog a Bad Name

Why have the classics such a bad name?

The difficulty, as I see it, is that high school students too often have forced on them works of literature which are chiefly of historical importance or are intellectually and technically beyond the interests of adolescents. Milton's earlier poems, Addison's and Lamb's essays, Burke's "Conciliation," Sheridan's comedies, Gray's "Elegy," most volumes of selected poetry, Dicken's "Tale of Two Cities"—are, regarded as literature, only minor works. So far as they might give a glimpse of the simplicities, and the breadths and depths of literature, they are incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial. Rightly the students resent them.

But they do not, I think, resent the "Odyssey," "Hamlet," the first part of "Don Quixote," "Les Miserables," Huxley, Emerson, Walt Whitman's

Civil War poems, "Huckleberry Finn,"—works which, as I see them, give the word "classic" a connotation which is neither limited nor specialized nor hateful, whereas the other list only too often leaves the student with a settled conviction that the literature of the past is curious in form, difficult in vocabulary, erudite in allusion, and of little personal appeal.

The works chosen to introduce young people to the classics should be those simple and racy in speech and idiom, highly colored, moving, full of gusto and laughter and tears, shrewd apophthegm and high philosophy in homely phrase. Why the mannered eighteenth century, that age when England tried to be Latin and failed dismally, should be so emphasized for young people at the age when prose and reason mean least, I have never been able to guess. But it is undoubtedly responsible for much of the inferiority complex all teachers have to face when they attempt to teach those greatest classics whose rule is universal.

"Time's Laughing-Stocks"

It is absurd to believe either that you must enjoy all that are called classic or that all classics are still worthy to be enjoyed. Time plays its tragic jokes on so many of them. Those most likely to survive are those least topical and temporal. The

cosmography and politics of Dante means so little to us that more and more we taste him in the most vivid passages of the "Inferno" and let the complex scheme of the "Purgatorio" and "Paradiso" go. More and more we tend to concentrate on a book or two of "Paradise Lost," as Milton's philosophy ceases to have any meaning for us. The day of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" as a universal English classic is done. It is not read, and when read, not understood. Its story can not wing its moribund theology. Most of the second part of "Faust" means nothing to anybody except a scholarly German.

The comedies of Aristophanes with their Shavian allusions, the bulk of the intentionally topical Elizabethan literature, all the pseudo-epics of the Renaissance,—books of this sort we may dip into, taste, and pass on, knowing all we need with self-respect to know, unless by some queer chance our interest is genuinely focussed on one. The bulk of even our great moderns we may as cheerfully do without. The great writer is almost invariably the prolific writer. He who produces a few perfect things lacks something of the headlong, careless energy which is genius, and lacking it is of less importance to his age. But time will avenge him. His few perfect pieces may stand on the shelf beside the equally few which time has

preserved from among the "fifty volumes" of the Balzac or the Scott. To know the great at their best is enough.

Be not afraid to drop a classic which no longer means much to our day. On the other hand be not afraid to adopt one which suddenly, as if by acclamation, a generation recognises. The fame of "The Way of All Flesh," of "The Dynasts," of "Jean Cristophe," of (even) the newest "Remembrance of Things Past," recent as they are, is probably as secure as that of many a work of the past touted in the schools. And to us they are infinitely more significant than, say, "Daniel Deronda" or "Idylls of the King."

If you find Byron means something to you and Shelley doesn't, it is no shame to drop Shelley and concentrate on Byron, *providing* you know what Shelley intended and have tasted him enough to have ground for distaste. If you find the entire Elizabethan age bewilders you while that of Johnson and Pope gives you a feeling of solid security and satisfaction, you need feel no sense of loss in abandoning the one to explore the other.

Do not make the mistake of trying to judge one age or country or person in terms of another. The classics are a highly variegated menagerie of strange beasts. Often, it is true, you will find understanding of a present day author illuminated

by knowing something of the past, and *vice versa*. Petronius's dinner at Trimalchio's in the "Satyricon" might have been written by some hard-boiled night club novelist of New York, 1929. Rabelais's experiments in style as the middle ages went to pot throw an interesting light on James Joyce's experiments in style as the nineteenth century goes to pot. Henry James throws light on Hergesheimer and Anatole France on Thornton Wilder. In Ernest Hemingway does not some long dead, anonymous, and laconic teller of salty Gaulish anecdotes walk again? The more beams of light you can converge on a figure, the more brilliant and three-dimensioned does he stand out against the blackness of oblivion.

Iconoclasts and Artists

And do not, as you unconsciously will unless you are on your guard, make the mistake of judging the writings of the past by the fashions of the day. Let it speak to you in its own tongue, its own idiom. Remember, that one of the qualities which makes a classic is originality. Nine tenths of the literature of any age is imitation and perishes. But that work which in its own day attracts attention for its originality may by that very fact survive. Extreme radicalism, it is true, often works more against than for. Poets saying old

things in a new form or poets saying new things in an old form may attract attention for their originality. But poets saying new things in a new form may miss their mark entirely, or at best suffer long neglect, like Meredith, Browning, or Whitman. Nevertheless it was originality, the breaking of images, the venturing on new trails, that started on their careers such men as Wordsworth, Hugo, Wagner, Ibsen and Shaw.

Shaw goes so far as to say that no literature is of importance to posterity that has not been "good journalism" in its own age. There is much in that statement, providing that the "news" of the work, its essence, be not too cluttered with temporal and local allusions which become incomprehensible in two generations. Pope's "Essay on Man" was good journalism and survives. Pope's "Dunciad" was bad, gossipy journalism and is dead.

But in a greater sense I believe that the man who swims against the current of his age has a better chance of surviving than the complaisant and acquiescent yes-man. The great names of the nineteenth century were the dynamic image-breakers who overthrew an authority and set up one. Wordsworth, Shelley, George Eliot, Hugo, Heine, Wagner, Zola, Ibsen, Nietzsche, Tolstoi —these are the great names. We forget this in

America. We remember it only in Walt Whitman and have in consequence deprecated him for three quarters of a century. We prefer to think of Thoreau as a naturalist instead of the man who wrote "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience." We have let the Newthoughters adopt and emasculate Emerson and prefer to forget how he read the riot act to Harvard College, the Unitarian Church, and all those at ease in Zion. We laugh at "Maud Muller" and love "Snow Bound" and forget what a fire-eater was the author of "Ichabod" and "Massachusetts to Virginia." Yes, many of the classics are classics because they were in their day dynamic radicals.

But beyond all that is an even greater reason for survival, that serenity, that universality, which includes all things and advocates none. Perhaps Chaucer and Shakespeare are more secure than Milton because they did not break their hearts with controversy, and Sophocles is the supreme poet of a civilization in which Euripides was only the voice of protest. Perhaps Thackeray was wiser and finer than Dickens, and Poe and Hawthorne than Lowell, because they contemplated and interpreted and were not troubled. Perhaps even in literature Mary's is still the better part. Perhaps in admiring the fighting men

we slight the artist who has no need of battle. Many of you will believe so, I know.

But this originality which makes a classic need not express itself in militant doctrine. It can as well be saved through vividness of spirit alone, a human spirit which, whatever its intellectual and spiritual shortcomings, has after all so keen a sense of life and such gusto in expressing it that one is charmed in spite of oneself. Christopher Marlowe had it in his way and Samuel Pepys in his. Robert Browning in his high-tide when he wrote "Men and Women" had it abundantly, so had Jane Austen in her lady-like way. Gogol and Oliver Wendell Holmes, the Reverend Lawrence Stern and Alphonse Daudet, Benevenuto Cellini and Catullus. Of all these you may say with Walt Whitman, "who touches this book touches a man."

These are not the supreme and serene interpreters and reconcilers, neither are they the megaphones of the age to come. They strike us, above all, as folks, persons, enormously alive and interested in life. Some of them talk about themselves, some of them are severely objective—either way, a page of one is not to be confused with a page by any other human being, which, incidentally, is one of the tests of genius.

Lastly, and closely allied to these, are the

classics which survive through style alone, through perfection of phrasing. Many named in the preceding paragraph belong here as well, for the symbol of a vivid personality is a vivid style. But there are others who, however neutral of person, have yet achieved a style and survive. One cannot imagine some of these works being remembered at all had they worn other phrasing. The "Euphues" of Lyly, Sir Thomas Browne with his "Urn Burial," Gray's "Elegy," Gibbons's history, Fitzgerald's "Rubaiyyat," Lamb, De Quincy, Rossetti, William Morris, . . . Martin Tupper. One chooses, perforce, examples in English.

These are some of the reasons why classics have become classics, waked up like Childe Harold to find themselves famous, or secured tardy and grudging recognition. And these are some of the reasons why their lights still burn today, however dangerously some of them seem windblown.

Ideals and Tastes

But what you can *not* say is that all, alike, have helped and heartened man with a clear and wholesome idealism—the usual pulpit definition of great literature. Review them in your memory, this motley throng of saints and martyrs, scala-

wags and perverts, mystics, agnostics, materialists, gentlewomen and bohemians, aristocrats, bourgeois, beggars and jail birds, complacent, hysterical, fighting mad, ecstatic—and you will say to yourself that whatever element in life or mood in man, however mean or trivial or wicked, can get itself expressed vividly enough, that expression will become a classic and will be treasured up to a life beyond life.

Neither can you say that careful consideration of the classics will give you certain clues to the ingredients of "good literature." So many people who demand this sort of definition seem to think that literature is like a cake, composed of certain elements according to a certain recipe. Any knowledge of the fate of the synthetic epics of the Renaissance and later, long poems written according to classic formula, should disabuse them of the notion. But the notion that literature is a spontaneous, perhaps accidental, not-to-be-repeated expression of a positive and interesting temperament with a knack for writing is so much more difficult than the recipe notion that many people never grasp it. And the teaching of literature which works from the outside in, from the ingredients rather than from the personality, is hopelessly blurring the question.

The eighteenth century believed that literature

was a matter of ingredients and cooking. As a result there was written in that century not one single piece of imaginative literature comparable to the "Prometheus Bound," the Job, "The Divine Comedy," the "Hamlet," the "Paradise Lost," the "Faust" of other ages. All its works of the imagination were second rate, all its great works were critical. For criticism can, to a certain extent, be written and understood on the recipe theory.

Suppose this notion were true. If Homer were literature, then Beowulf could not be. If "King Lear" were, the "Andromaque" of Racine could not be. If "The Ancient Mariner" were, what of Johnson's "London"? What recipe could be stretched to cover "Tom Jones" and "The Golden Bowl" of Henry James, "The Man Who Laughs" and "The Rise of Silas Lapham"? William Dean Howells praised Jane Austen as the most perfect of novelists; Mark Twain remarked that you might begin an excellent library—by leaving her out!

No! Mr. Kellett in his recent and excellent little book "The Whirligig of Taste" (Harcourt, Brace & Co.) has shown beyond dispute that all standards of criticism are matters of fashion, depending on energies outside literature, as well as within it. The development of literature is like that of Spencer's organism, the response of some-

thing alive to pressure by its environment. From age to age different criteria persuade the reading public that they are the only criteria. The age of Elizabeth loved a flamboyance and an extravagance that the age of Anne coldly ruled out of court. The age of Johnson relished a coarseness and vulgarity that the age of Victoria shuddered at. Compare the "Tom Jones" that the gentle Cowper read aloud to gentlewomen with the "Pendennis" that Thackeray flattered himself was like "Tom Jones." The age of Howells refused to discuss matters which are the mainstay of the modern American novel and admired a style which we now consider gray and colorless.

These are all matters of taste. The classics are those examples of the particular taste of a particular age which have enough life in them, vitality of theme or style, to survive on the beach of time when its particular tide ebbs. Often a work that enjoyed poor health in its own age will be found pulsing with life by some later naturalist of letters. Hermann Melville was rejected by his own age; today we find in him qualities that, in our opinion, make him an equal of Hawthorne.

We cannot, therefore, use the classics as yardsticks by which to establish and defend any one particular concept of taste. But we can use them to develop taste in us.

We can learn to realize, for instance, how weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable is most of the mass production writing of our age, the hundreds of machine stories indistinguishable in the memory from one another. Take a dozen of our popular story tellers and see if you can find one page in any one of them that differs strongly enough in style, method, personality from a page in any other to make it memorable. Then turn to a page of Jane Austen, of Stevenson, of Sterne, of Hawthorne, of Hugo, of Hardy, and see if you can what constitutes the difference between hand-made writing and machine-made writing. You can learn in this way to distinguish the genuine grand style from the false, the genuine accent of romance from the synthetic. It is a matter of sharpening your perceptions by practice.

Last Caution

There is one great popular obstacle to this sharpening the perceptions, the habit so many people have (and seem to be proud of) wallowing in emotion when they read. When you find a person who cannot read this and that because it upsets her so, or who adores such a writer because of the emotional kick she gets from him, there you will find an unintelligent reader. Such a reader will never discriminate, will, naturally, prefer

those writers who over-write. It is the business of the writer to do his utmost to make you feel as he wishes; but it is your business to keep your intelligence separate from your emotions and never let your feelings annihilate your perception of whether this stimulus is clever or stupid, whether it is worthy or ignoble, whether it is an individual speaking or one of the herd. Easy sentimentalism is the sign of an inferior person, from whom intelligent reading is not to be expected.

The advice to read no books except those that have been tested by time is stupid advice. Equally stupid is the habit of shying off from a classic because you have heard it called a classic. You will be surprised how "modern" some of them are. A catholic and eclectic knowledge of the best-loved literature of the past is the safest assurance that you will know how to discriminate in the present. Your horizon will be infinitely wider and your compass will point true north.

CHAPTER VIII

The Meaning of Style

IN the last chapter I spoke of literature as "a spontaneous, perhaps accidental, not-to-be-repeated expression of a positive and interesting temperament *with a knack for writing.*"

Hitherto I have been speaking mainly of content. But the more one thinks of it the more one is convinced that it is the knack for writing that makes literature, that all classics are only flies which happened to be preserved in the amber of style. I have known young writers for the cheapest sort of fiction magazines, who know perfectly well that they can spin a good yarn, to spend their evenings poring over Conrad or Hudson or E. M. Forster in the hope of catching a glimpse of the secret which alone can preserve their work from swift oblivion. And I have known equally young Ph.D.'s, biologist or historian or classicist, intent only on throwing facts together in the German manner, to wonder why a Beebe or a Truslow Adams or a Gilbert Murray is read avidly while their dreadful tomes lie uncut. The answer is Style.

The loudly expressed scorn of Dryasdust for what he calls "facile popularization" is too often only the defence reaction of an accurate but dull person against one who is sufficiently accurate and brilliant as well. Our present renaissance of public interest in ideas, our "humanizing of knowledge" is more the work of men like James Harvey Robinson, Gilbert Murray, H. G. Wells, Will Durant—all men with "styles"—than of all the academic scholars who cannot write a readable page. The new "Encyclopaedia Britannica" has been largely taken out of academic hands and rewritten, to attract and please as well as to inform.

Style *vs.* Stereotype

As usual we come back to personality. When Buffon said "The style is the man," he said about all that can be said. Was it not Wordsworth who said that language is not so much the dress of thought as thought itself? If you think interestingly your style will be interesting. It may be difficult, torturous, annoying, like that of Thorstein Veblen or Marcel Proust, but it will be interesting because it is individual. For "style" does not necessarily mean "good style." It means at best only that expression which is so personal that it makes one man's page different from another's. Out of a dozen themes or a dozen personal letters one,

however barbarous, will be arrestingly individual in its phrasing. The rest will be stereotypes, jumbles of threadbare conventional phrases. Occasionally one may feel a personality struggling weakly to express itself but not knowing how; more often one will guess that this stereotype of words reveals only a piece of human mass production, like Elmer Rice's Mr. Zero.

The amateur who feels that he is full of ideas if only he could express them will probably never express them. Gray's "mute inglorious Milton" is a myth. If he be mute he is not a Milton. Either he will spontaneously create for himself a style unlike any other's, like Carlyle or Walt Whitman or Victor Hugo, or he will laboriously and self-consciously build for himself an adequate individual instrument, like Benjamin Franklin and Robert Louis Stevenson, Flaubert and James Branch Cabell. Or he will turn out prose like so much pig-iron and will perish from the remembrance of men.

Language is at best only an approximation. No phrasing can ever catch and render worthily the swift unspoken certainties of intuition which we seldom bother to phrase. No day-time setting of words can ever render adequately those brilliant flashes of the insomniac. Young's "Night Thoughts" seem to us stodgy stuff, only, perhaps,

because he wrote them down and spoiled them. Browning, that most audacious of phrasers, that buccaneer on the high seas of the King's English, knew this well enough. The Rabbi knew that it was the idea and not the style that counted with God—

> "Thoughts hardly to be packed
> Within the narrow act
> Fancies that broke through language and escaped"——

and that what was saved was often a sorry substitute for what was lost.

The *Mot Juste*

The vaguer the concept the more exact must be the phrasing. When Flaubert advised young Maupassant to study a tree in flower or a flaming fire until he could describe them exactly as uniques, he was merely giving away the secret that makes "Salammbo" great. There is, he said, only one word to express a thing, one verb to animate it, one adjective to qualify it. There is but one word to make the grocer or the cab horse different from all others of their kind. You will find the advice in full in the preface to "Pierre and Jean." It was that cult of the *mot juste* which makes all modern style so different from the conventional phrasing of the pseudo-classicists and the loose, headlong

phrasing of the romantics, and so much more interesting.

For one thing it hinders the flowing pen, that easy writing that makes such curst hard reading. Chesterton burlesques this difficulty in the immortal scene in "The Napoleon of Notting Hill" where King Auberon can't describe the battle for lack of the *mot juste,* and J. M. Barrie foreshadows the literary career of T. Sandys in the scene where Sentimental Tommy fails in the scholarship examination through his preoccupation with the right Scots phrase. Today no writer is as fluent, or as careless, as Scott was, and our reading if we have any sense of words, is thereby more pleasurable.

If you would taste properly the phrasing of today you must learn the flavor of the past. Take a page of Malory's "Morte D'Arthur" and see if you cannot visualize old Sir Thomas, with fingers more used to hold a sword than a pen, struggling to digest his multifarious sources into a plain and forthright tale, striving in a language still barbarous and chaotic to make his telling simple and direct—one of the greatest feats of all our English prose. Follow the phrasing of the English Bible from Wyclif through Tyndale and Coverdale to the Authorized Version. Then look at

Isaiah, say, or Job in the Revised and see what has happened.

Read a page of Lyly's "Euphues" for an example of a purely artificial style of exaggerated balance and antithesis and see how that elaborate influence lasted in English prose through the courtly Raleigh and the orotund Sir Thomas Browne and the long-winded cavalier historians, until all the gentlemen-scholars were exiled or in hiding and the new dissenting middle-class, firmly in the saddle, demanded (and got) a new style, the sturdy, unimaginative, blunt prose of Bunyan and Defoe and even Dryden, that so well expressed the shop-keeper's England. See that style refined into the self-conscious simplicities of Addison and the naïve simplicities of Goldsmith. See it bludgeoned into disuse by the pompous Ciceronian formalities of Gibbon and Burke and Johnson, and at the last livened by Macaulay into something more showy and practical. There is no study in literature more fascinating.

History in Style

Styles reflect philosophies. The eighteenth century in France and England, for instance, the age of Voltaire and Pope, was, at its best, unmatched for clear, exact and decorous expression. That age believed in the utterly orderly universe of

Newton and Laplace, in authority of state and church, in castes and due subordinations in society, in warfare conducted on parade; it liked the clean-cut lines of pseudo-classic architecture, formal gardens, Bach fugues, and Flaxman drawings. No wonder that its poetry was the couplet of Pope and Fontaine and its prose the cool, impersonal, sensible, and restrained statement of Voltaire and Hume.

The French revolution freed the middle-class from its prison of status, destroyed order and symmetry in state and society, exalted the individual his passions and ambitions, turned back to nature and intuition. Youth panting and ardent dreamed that all things were possible. Mediævalism fired his imagination, pseudo-Gothic replaced pseudo-classic, the groves that were God's first temples replaced Versailles and its gardens. Democracy, steam engines, flowing hair and long trousers, Burns's poems, Kotzebue's plays, Scott's romances—all were eager breaks with the past. Suddenly we find ourselves in the Romantic age.

Style whether in poetry or prose becomes of a sudden natural, eager, breathless and exclamatory, emotional, vivid in color, emphatic, disordered, highly personal, everything that eighteenth century style was not. Compare Shelley with Crabbe, Dickens with Jane Austen, Lamb with Johnson.

Shakespeare was the model and Hugo the result. Delacroix recreated painting and Beethoven music. Goethe dreamed of Euphorion and hinted that his name was Byron. So strong were these forces that not until the end of the century did they peter out. From Wordsworth to William Watson, from Keats to Stephen Phillips, from Dickens to Walter Besant one can measure the decline of force in the weakening of style.

Similarly one can trace the change to the sceptical, scientific, analytic age of realism in the style of Flaubert, Zola, George Moore, Hardy, and Theodore Dreiser. Similarly one should be able to come to some conclusion about the temper of our own age by studying the styles of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence, and our Americans in the "Caravan." There is, I imagine, no need to labor the point.

Modern, Classic, Romantic

Even such a rapid sketch should be sufficient to show that even historically there is no such thing as "good style." There are only good styles, that is, styles which have sharp individuality, which seem fresh from the mint, which carry conviction, whether they exhibit the epigrammatic violence of Hugo or the bland "emphasis of understatement" of Anatole France. Each age develops uncon-

sciously its own and each writer modifies the style of his age to reveal his own personality.

Our age happens to be an age of simplicity, however affected, in the arts. The clean-cut and experimental line accented by sharp color seems best to express us. The rococo and the baroque are definitely not to our taste. For the moment, then, the Elizabethan and the Romantic are out of fashion. We even pretend to believe that the best style *per se* is that which is most transparent, which is a bit cool and colorless, a bit flat and unemphatic, in which one does not feel a strong personality getting between one and the object looked at. Such was the style of Addison, of William Dean Howells, of George Moore, and Thomas Hardy. Such seems to be the style aimed at by the more self conscious of the younger writers here and abroad.

Such a style is level and unexcited. It uses a small vocabulary and gets its effects by the careful arrangement and balance of a few words. Anatole France, cutting up his manuscript with the scissors and pasting words and phrases together again in new combinations, learned the secret better, perhaps, than anyone else. The verbs are quiet and conventional, the adjectives few, the denotation of the words exact, the connotation unimportant.

"Denotation" is what a word means, "connotation" what it suggests.

The romantic style, on the other hand, is a style of purple patches, of violent verbs and highly sensuous adjectives. One feels the personality of the writer constantly intruding. Words are chosen to evoke moods rather than to describe facts; they are chosen for their connotation, this power to suggest tones and over-tones. In his story "Wireless" Kipling speaks of "one of the two high water marks of English poetry"—

> "A savage place! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon lover"—

phrases magical in their connotation, strongly evocative of a certain mood. This is true also of the other lines he chooses—

> "Charmed magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn."

These are the signs of romantic style. If the classic is a Greek temple, the romantic is a gothic cathedral, full of chiaroscuro, of colored glass windows, of holy images and obscene gargoyles, of the emotional, the mystic, and the grotesque. Hugo wrote in this style and Algernon Swinburne, Marlow and young Will Shakespeare, Charles

Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville. In our own day the Powys brothers command this colored magic and the flamboyant Gilbert Keith Chesterton, and James Branch Cabell can upon occasion, with his tongue in his cheek, use it for his own sinful purposes. Curiously enough a great deal of our modern realism, however photographic in detail, is in mood and style markedly romantic. It is probably inferior art, as all overemphasis and distortion to produce a marked immediate effect are inferior to the great styles—Homer and Dante, the mature Shakespeare and Goethe in his middle age.

Matthew Arnold in his introduction to Ward's "English Poets" developed what he called the "touchstone" method of judging poetry. Unfortunately, its value largely depends on whether the reader is moved by the same lines that once moved Arnold. It is so purely subjective as to be open to grave criticism. But after all, what other method may be used in coming to conclusions about style? Our own day is a day of many highly variegated and experimental styles. It is unquestionably an age of transition. All that was good in the past is still good. Many new styles still in the making may stand as the peculiar monuments of this age. All we can do is to "prove all things and hold fast

to that which is good." At least we can train our ear to hear accurately the important, strongly differentiated styles of the past. By these we can test our new stylists. Do they ring true, we must ask, always remembering that many a piece of writing has survived almost solely because of some eccentricity of style that posterity has grown too fond of to wish to lose.

The American Language

We in America have a peculiar style problem of our own. Many a worthy person prefers British novels to American because the "English" is purer. Undoubtedly. But may not some of us prefer with even more justice American novels because the "American" is purer? I am perfectly serious. If "Babbitt" or "Arrowsmith" needs a glossary for British readers, or such a play as "Is Zat So?" does it mean that the writers are using bad English, or something infinitely more important—that we are slowly developing a language, or at least a marked dialect, which may well be called American and in which our most characteristic literature of the future may be written.

I am inclined to believe that this is true. Who are our most vital and characteristic American writers of today? I imagine that a critical poll

would name Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Eugene O'Neill, and Sinclair Lewis. What common denominator have these five men? Simply that they all write about the average undifferentiated American *in his own language.* It is not the English of Howells, of Mrs. Wharton, of Thornton Wilder. It is American. Add to these names Ring Lardner, Ernest Hemingway, H. L. Mencken and Heywood Broun, who also write in American for Americans, and the case becomes even stronger. All these men are writing strong, significant, imaginative or critical work in a language which is certainly not the language of Galsworthy, Hugh Walpole, or J. Middleton Murry, let alone that of Matthew Arnold or Walter Pater.

Increasingly our literature is written, and is going to be written, by men whose names show descent from central Europe and not from the British Isles. Increasingly the elements which dominated our literature from 1630 to 1900 are going to give ground to elements not unlike those in the great European literatures of the nineteenth century. Whether you like it or not, that is what is going to happen. And this literature will be written in a new language, less and less like classic literary English, more and more the language of our American streets—sublimated into art.

You will laugh, but it has happened before. I suppose that a Roman patrician of the age of Marcus Aurelius would have laughed too, if he had been told that his language, the tongue of Cicero and Virgil and Tacitus, would, a few hundred years hence, live only in the offices of a religion he had scarcely heard of, and that the future great literature of his Italy would be written in a kind of jargon which, descended from the immigrant's slang in the suburbs, the slums of Rome, had been sublimated into literary language by one Dante and one Boccaccio.

It took a long time. It will take a long time with us, but it will come. Our cultivated classes will speak American and read English as today they read French. But our literature will be American, the language in which Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson and Carl Sandburg are blazing the literary trail, and for which H. L. Mencken in his "The American Language" has already furnished us a *gradus*.

Since this is so, do not be snobbish about the American language when you meet it in literature. Do not treat it as the genteel poetasters of the period following the Civil War, the Aldriches, Stoddards and Bokers, treated the barbarians, Walt Whitman and Mark Twain and others like

them, who even then were writing in American for Americans.

If you want critical authority you can do no better than look up a very fine book "The Future of American Prose" by Joseph Warren Beach (Chicago University Press) and see what the author has to say about the prose style of Sherwood Anderson, of H. L. Mencken, and Alfred Kreymborg, all of whom he finds highly significant.

"Composition"

These writers and others like them, who enjoy the peculiar flavor of our American speech and strive to preserve it on the printed page, will be the redeemers of our letters. The workaday language of our newspapers, magazines and novels is flat, facile and machine-made. It is the result of our methods of teaching "composition" in our schools, a method whose aim seems to be to iron out all individuality, blunt the natural idiom into stereotypes, excise all our native colloquialisms, produce, in short, a third rate bastard English, not really English at all but a kind of synthetic shorthand the only virtue of which is a kind of characterless correctness, like "library hand" in penmanship. A surprising number of our public school teachers write such a style and they can do no

better than to hand on the formula to the youngsters in their charge.

Good style is traditionally "nervous" style. But the word "nervous" has become so corrupted in our speech that it means universally a sickness of the nerves. There is no doubt that many of our experimental writers are writing a style which is nervous in that sense, the style of a sick ego. But nervous style in the good sense is one "abounding in nerve-force, vigorous, sinewy, highly strung, terse and crisp." The nouns are specific, the verbs are active and dynamic, the adjectives few. But even a style sick with "nerves," so long as it is pungent and individual, is better than the flatulence and banality of a Harold Bell Wright or a Dr. Frank Crane.

It is easy to discriminate between the styles that taste strongly on the tongue. But the reader who really wishes to know something about style will not be content with Hugo and Browning, Kipling and Nietzsche, Chesterton and Mencken, but will seek further, trying to get at the secret of the more delicate and unemphatic flavors, Jane Austen and George Moore, Anatole France and Sarah Orne Jewett, Edwin Arlington Robinson and the author of "Trivia." If you can savor these, you are, I think, safe with any style.

THE MEANING OF STYLE

Once in a great while one who writes about writing has a style of his own. I have found particularly helpful one of the older American books on composition as we understand it today. Written in the early nineties, it was a pioneer in the field. Nowadays, when every young whip-stitch teaching freshman English gets out his own manual, it is undeservedly neglected. But the "English Composition" of Barrett Wendell still remains, to me at least, the most charming to read and the most wise in its counsel.

CHAPTER IX

Romantic and Realistic

WILLIAM JAMES revolutionized philosophy by going at it from the point of view of the psychologist; that is, instead of constructing a system in the air, so to speak, he tried to find out how the human mind actually works and then shaped a philosophy to fit. That is, I imagine, the best way to go at the problem which, more than any other, bothers the amateur reader. The number of people who insist that they cannot read "realism" is legion, but when you pin them down, one by one, to find out what a person means, you will find him, perhaps, enjoying hugely something which is genuinely realistic or objecting violently to something which is at bottom really romantic. It is the old difficulty of dissociating ideas, the inability to see the wood for the trees, of which I have spoken before. Realism and romanticism are moods not methods.

The objective, historical explanation does not always help. Roughly one can say that the ancient Greeks were realists even though they saw their world in terms of gods and goddesses, nymphs

and other personified natural forces. The modern Americans are romantics in the main, even though they see their world in terms of motors and dynamos, airplanes and the radio. The mediævalists, not merely Chaucer but Dante, were on the whole realists. The Elizabethans were romantics, as were the writers immediately following the French revolution, the disciples of Rousseau and Schiller and Byron. The Augustan age and the second half of the nineteenth century were genuinely realistic, while we of today, especially since the war, seem to me to be more akin to the romantic Renaissance of which the Elizabethan age was a part. I am speaking, of course, primarily in terms of literature.

Roughly speaking, the realist keeps his eye on the object and the romanticist sees life through a temperament.

I can do no better, for my purposes, than to quote a few paragraphs I wrote recently for "Creative Reading" (Creative Reading, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.). I was analyzing what I called the "classic" temper, which to me is only another way of saying the "realistic" temper. Incidentally, it defines romanticism by contrast.

The Qualities of Classic Realism

What are the common denominators of this

classic realism? The fact that we have to leave out almost all mediæval, Elizabethan, and early nineteenth century literature means, of course, that it is not the sole expression of genius. In fact, there may be more genius in these others. Very often the classic temper may be talent carried to its highest point by unremitting careful art rather than the ungoverned turbulence and power of the imagination usually called genius. It is not a question of truth but of treatment, not of power but of use of power.

One can sum it up in a phrase. It consists in keeping the eye on the object. "To see life steadily and to see it whole." Now the implications of keeping the eye on the object are many; more, perhaps, than might be imagined at first thought.

It means first that there must be an object to keep one's eye upon. It means the notions that the general run of men have had about the world. The world exists and may be dealt with by the senses and the mind. It means a fairly sharp distinction between what obviously exists and what equally obviously is "all in your eye." This last, by the way, is the sensible man's final judgment on the subjective artist, on the Platonic idealist, the gnostic, the mystic, the metaphysician, the romanticist, the symbolist, and the impressionist. In a word, on a great deal of nineteenth and twen-

tieth century experiments in art. It's all in your eye!

In other words, any overwhelming bias or preoccupation rules one out of the world of classic art. That world is the world of James's Pragmatism, a pluralistic world, governed by many apparently contradictory laws, but seen with a single eye, the eye of the average man, *l'homme moyen sensuel,* the man who recognizes instinctively that there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy—but also that one must not get too excited and too seduced and prejudiced in contemplating them. There is a touch of saving Laodiceanism in most classic art.

Now, as to the eye. Classic art is disposed to question Zola's remarks about art being a corner of life seen through a temperament. It is precisely the temperament that makes the mischief, that gives us Rousseau, Shelley, the younger Goethe and Dostoievsky.

It is the artist's business, say the classicists, to wrestle with his temperament and subdue it, as a Christian wrestles with his lusts. It is his business to see those things which are common to all people instead of those which are peculiar to a few, and to see them with the old, eternal, unaided human eye. Not with the telescope or the microscope nor

the spectroscope, not with magic spectacles rose-colored or green, but with the eyes that beheld the wine-dark sea and the black ships and the rosy-fingered dawn.

Out of these two essentials, the object and the eye, is built a style which we call classic. What are its characteristics? Well, one is that a young and inexperienced person can understand it and yet an old and complex person will still be finding new depths and possibilities in its calm and compact expressions. On the surface it seems smooth and clear sailing, but there are depths. It is economical in expression but often says more than a spate of words. It is straightforward; it takes things in the old familiar orders and patterns of human experience. It is Euclidean and Newtonian; it knows nothing of Einstein and the quantum theory.

Its feet are on the ground. It observes, records, and criticizes. It is willing to guess and wonder but strictly within the limits of what can be known. It does not bother much with origins or teleologies. It takes its folk-lore and mythologies and dogmas calmly and a bit sceptically. It sees man as man, neither as a fallen angel nor a developed brute. It strives to keep balance between flesh and mind and spirit, letting none tyrannize. It is neither materialist nor transcendentalist. It has a saving trace

of the vulgarity and coarseness of human life. It does not cry for the moon. It distrusts Utopias, mundane or celestial.

It selects and simplifies and patterns. Its model is the Greek temple, not the Gothic cathedral or the Grand Babylon hotel. It believes in visible outlines and clearly seen proportions. It discards the arabesque, the baroque and the rococo. It prefers both nature and man in their civilized aspects. Its mottos are the old platitudes: the golden mean, the middle way, nothing too much. This pattern implies design and craftsmanship; its result is inevitable continuity and something we call universality.

It does not care to probe too deep. It shies away from profound analysis, difficult hypotheses, and wild guesses. It is sceptical of new notions. It still prefers to think of man in the old patterns, villain and hero, the bad and the good. On the whole it believes that experience will back it up in this simplification. It prefers not to look on man as a tangle of twisted impulses, of reflexes and thyroid glands and the like. It believes that Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero is still good enough for the artist. It does not care for isms of any kind. And it hates to see an amateur scientist spoiled to make a bad poet. For it is, by

definition, the expression of the world's common sense.*

This last paragraph may seem to rule out a good deal of modern writing that prides itself on being most realistic. I believe it does rule it out, and that much of what we call realistic is so temperamentally distorted as to be really romantic. Zola for instance and his imitators, among them Frank Norris, were romantics. They saw the world through magnifying glasses.

Another way of looking at the problem is to consider the various ways of looking at life, the fantastic, the romantic, the realistic, as so many stages in the development of the adult imagination. Those people whom I thus cavalierly classify as permanent adolescents will probably disagree heartily, for the notion will be wondrous strange to them, but they should therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

In the following passage I am once again quoting myself. Having once written it and seen that it was good, I am too lazy to go to the trouble of rephrasing it, losing, perhaps, in the process that first fine careless rapture.

The Child and the Adolescent

Fantasy is the imagination of the child, to whom

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all things are possible. My small daughter standing on the wharf overlooking the summer sea asks me: Is it over my head, dada? Yes. Is it over your head, dada? Yes. Well, is it over a giant's head, dada? Dada and the giant are on the same plane of actuality. She lives in a world in which, literally, anything can happen. This is the spirit of all child-like and primitive literature. It is the world of myth and fairy tales, of the old Greek and Scandinavian stories, of the Grimm brothers and the Arabian Nights. It is the world of fairies, giants and demi-gods, of wizards and genii, in which the laws of physical nature hardly exist or may be set aside with ease by the sword of sharpness, the shoes of swiftness and the cap of invisibility. Fantasy is the literature of the triumph of imagination over possibility. Its chosen land is the Never-never-never Land of "Peter Pan," the strange kingdoms of the dead, of night and of the future through which Tyltyl and Mytyl travel in "The Blue Bird." It is a Garden of the Hesperides, the Fairy Wood outside Athens in "Midsummer Night's Dream."

To the child it is the natural world: to the artist it is the world to which we escape in dreams. And so Fantasy is also the literature of the dream freed momentarily from the censorship of the waking intelligence. In dreams we can fly easily, we can

pass rapidly as thought from place to place. Time and space are confused and yet natural in their confusion. It is the dream world of Barrie's "A Kiss for Cinderella," the fairy wood of "Dear Brutus" by the same author.

Many adults grow out of patience with Fantasy for they forget their childhood. But people of ardent imagination, to whom the physical world is too limited in its range of possibility, escape thither in literature and find there complete freedom.

If Fantasy is the literature of childhood, Romance is the literature of adolescence. If Fantasy is the literature of the dream, Romance is the literature of the day-dream.

Some people never read novels. Some people, apparently, never day-dream but spend their reflective moments in useful planning. But most of us do day-dream, that is to say, we imagine "how nice it would be if—." Always we are the hero or the heroine of our own day-dreams. Always in our day-dream we are a little richer, a little more beautiful, a little more successful, a little more adventurous than we ever really can be in real life. The day-dream is the triumph of imagination over probability.

Romance is the day-dream in literary form. One might call it vicarious day-dreaming. The

romancer plays upon our wish to be something other than we really are and tells our own story for us. In its most elementary form it is what one might call shop-girl romance, the story about the poor girl who marries the prince or the millionaire. The bank-clerk delights in stories of pirates or rum-runners or crook-and-detective struggles. The stay-at-home whose job is a dull one wants tales of far away and long ago. That is what makes the Cinderella theme the oldest and most universal theme in the world. Next to it, perhaps, comes the Monte Cristo theme. They are wish fulfilments in literary form.

Too much novel reading may lead to incapability of action just as too much day-dreaming may lead to mental illness. But for most of us a moderate amount of either is not only wholesome but necessary. It is the simplest and most universal form of the longing for the ideal. In its more elementary form, it is true, it may be something as incredible as the Graustark stories, or a Douglas Fairbanks picture, but in its highest form it is Hugo's "Les Miserables" or Stevenson's "Treasure Island" where the dream is winged by genius.

The ordinary romantic novel has all the characteristics of day-dreaming. It is usually highly colored; it sees life through rose-colored glasses. Everything is exaggerated like a face made up for

the footlights. One can see the best examples of this sort of thing in Victor Hugo and Charles Dickens. Its sentiment tends to become sentimentalism; its humor tends to become grotesque caricature; its tragedy, melodrama. The villain is usually too black, the heroine too ideally innocent, the hero too nobly heroic, the comic characters too funny for words. Right always triumphs, wrong is always vanquished. And they all live happily ever after—the victory of the imagination over probability.

That is why I dared to call it the literature of the adolescent. It represents the most natural and the most wholesome mood of young people not experienced in life. And hundreds of thousands of people, perfectly mature and experienced in every other way, still remain adolescents in imagination. They feel that they have enough of real life in real life. Realism bores them or repels them or shocks them. They believe that no view of life is really true unless it is an idealistic one. Hence the enormous market for not merely the elementary impossible magazine stories of wish fulfilment but those lasting works of the imagination in which the artists have been able to transcend realism so as to interpret it in terms of the ideal. Hence from "East Lynne" all the way to "The Marble Faun" romance remains the most per-

manently appealing and beloved and important way of looking at life through literature.

The Adult

Realism is the literature of the adult who prefers to look at life without spectacles of rose or green. He prefers what Wordsworth calls the light of the common day. He prefers his imagination based on fact and winged by knowledge. He demands that it be above all, however conditioned by the temperament of the writer, truthful. For day-dreaming he wishes to substitute clear and open-eyed intelligent observation. It is the ability, which Matthew Arnold said was possessed by Sophocles, to see life steadily and see it whole. Its aim is to analyze life, somewhat in the spirit of the scientist with imagination, and then to put it together again and try to explain what it means. It should not over-emphasize the idealistic, as romance often does, at the expense of the material. Neither should it emphasize the material so as to exclude the other. It should be in theory the perfect synthesis of mind, flesh and spirit which the Greeks strove for.

It is a matter not of time but of temperament. There have always been realists. Certain epochs have felt it more than others. The ancient Greeks and Romans, the eighteenth century, and the last

half of the nineteenth looked at life on the whole realistically. The middle ages, the renaissance and the early nineteenth century had, on the whole, more of what we call the romantic spirit.

Homer's "Odyssey," the story of a wanderer who wanted to get home, is realistic in spite of the supernatural element in the poem. Tennyson's "Ulysses," the poem of the returned mariner who wished to die sailing beyond the boundaries of the known world, is romantic, though there isn't a goddess mentioned. "The Arabian Nights" is full of djinns and afrits and flying horses but the detail is marvelously realistic. Joseph Conrad's detail is meticulously realistic but the total mood is that intense day-dreaming mood we call romantic. And so it goes: Swift is soberly realistic in persuading us of the reality of his Lilliputians and Brobdignagians; Defoe wrote his imaginary stories with extreme care to give them the effect of historical narratives. Many historians dealing only with fact are untrustworthy because of their romantic coloring. Many novelists can make a purely imaginary occurrence seem more real than something one has experienced.

Realism has a bad name. To many people it is synonymous with the ugly and immoral. Their favorite word of reproach for it is "sordid."

There are several reasons for this reproach. One is that realism often is sordid, because it is the point of view of sordid persons. In that case it is sensational and meretricious. President Roosevelt used to say that every worthy social movement had its "lunatic fringe." Similarly every artistic movement has its fringe of profiteering and sensationalism. Again, the realist may be unskilled or incompetent. He sees too little and he emphasizes wrongly. He is like an amateur with a cheap camera taking snap-shots in glaring sunlight. The eyes squint, the feet stuck out too far in advance are monstrous. Much of our realism is simply bad camera work.

Often, too, realism is a reaction against too much romance and sentiment. If we are cloyed with sweets, we turn to sours and bitters. Much realism is a natural reaction against pictures of a world so full of sweetness and light that we turn against it. But also, and here is the chief reason why so many call realism sordid, many people refuse to face facts, dislike to think about them at all, especially in fiction. That is, they deny the artist the subject matter which they will tolerate in the preacher, the journalist and the historian. One can only ask Why. The great problem of human thought, since the beginning of literature,

is the problem of evil. It is the subject of all great religions, philosophies and dramatic poems, from "The Book of Job" down to "Faust." It is eternally fascinating to the novelist. In the last hundred years we have made great strides in understanding. Evil in heredity and environment, in sex, in crime, all have been enormously studied. Yet let the serious novelist attempt to deal with these subjects and many people refuse to read and want to have the book suppressed.

The realist is usually not inclined to be orthodox. The romanticist may exploit accepted ideals, reasoning from what are often considered absolute truths. The realist usually prefers the Baconian method. He collects and records his facts, then proceeds to build up an interpretation of life based on these facts. The interpretation often does not agree with the accepted ideal. The realist is often considered an iconoclast by his generation and a prophet by the next. But always his method must be to feel his way, slowly, honestly, as impartially as his temperament permits, setting down what he sees about life, slighting or slurring nothing, with as little distortion as possible, and out of his facts making pictures of which he can say "Here is life as I see it. I can't help it if you don't like it. So I see it. God helping me, I can do no other."

Such an account as this can be only a generalization. It needs exact and specific illustration. Let me, therefore, name a few novels which may be accepted as the best normal type of realism in fiction. A reading of any of these ought to help clear up the subject.

"Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defoe; "Pride and Prejudice" by Jane Austen; "Lost Illusions" by Balzac; "Middlemarch" by George Eliot; "Madame Bovary" by Flaubert; "Anna Karenina" by Tolstoi; "A Modern Instance" by W. D. Howells; "An American Tragedy" by Theodore Dreiser.

These are all different in method and in mood. But none, I think, is romantic.*

The Adept

There is, however, on further reflection, one more step. I do not know exactly what to call it, perhaps Symbolism or Relativism. It comes only when poet and reader alike have carried Realism as far as it can be carried, only to realize its insufficiency to deal with the truth. Then they turn back to the methods of Fantasy or Romance, but only to express a higher realism.

When Shakespeare had gone as far as he could

*"Creative Reading," Vol. I, No. 2, May, 1927.

in realism with "Othello" and "Troilus" and "King Lear" he phrased his final vision of the truth in "The Tempest," as fantastic in method as "A Midsummer Night's Dream" but infinitely beyond that in maturity, beyond even the reality of "Hamlet." When Euripides had said all he could about gods and men realistically in "Medea" and "The Trojan Women" and "Ion" he wrote, in the exile of his old age, the eucharistic mystery he called "The Bacchantes." The first part of "Faust," the work of the youthful and middle-aged Goethe is simple and realistic beside the second part, that complex and difficult series of symbols. Compare "The Brothers Karamazov" with "Crime and Punishment," "The Revolt of the Angels" with "Thais," "The Sunken Bell" with "The Weavers," "The Dynasts" with "The Return of the Native," and you will see that to the greatest artists inevitably comes a moment when Realism no longer suffices and they must return on their traces, back to the poetry of the world's childhood and youth, in order to find symbols fitting to express the ultimate reality. Those who never face this difficulty, however fine as artists, never quite try their powers to the full. Even Dreiser and Galsworthy, inveterate realists, have once or twice rather timidly essayed the

Symbolic as if aware of their limitations. Shaw in his old age dreams "Back to Methuselah" and Wells in his disillusionment invents "Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island" to express a truth that is greater than fact. To the neophyte symbols may be only a hindrance to the understanding, but to the adept the symbol and the mystery are one.

CHAPTER X

The Thinker and the Artist

ALL patterns are clean and sharp in theory but so infinitely blurred and ragged at the edge in practice. If style always matched content, how easy criticism would be! But such a congruity as that between G. K. Chesterton's philosophy and his style, or Jane Austen's, or Theodore Dreiser's, is not always to be found. I have known the most preposterous of fantastic romances, that cried aloud for a consonant style, to fail entirely in its effect because it was written in the most pedestrian and matter-of-fact newspaperese, and I have known a sober tale of fact to be given the lie by its needlessly fantastic dress of words. When the writer himself so often has so poor an ear, what can one expect of the reader?

Similarly one may be deceived by a story of romantic mood, the detail of which is so realistic as to lead one astray. Many of the so-called realists in our American literature after the Civil War were romantics at heart, but their use of local color was so skillful as to give their stories an apparent objective impersonality which did not

really exist. Occasionally, the opposite is true. A story genuinely realistic may wear a surface glamour of romance. Gautier's "Mademoiselle de Maupin," for instance, is at bottom a seriously realistic, almost a clinical, study of the perversities of love, but so thick and intense is its romantic coloring that many a reader classes it instinctively with such a work, say, as Balzac's "The Wild Ass's Skin," which *is* romantic. In much the same way our own James Branch Cabell uses a studiously romantic style, background, and fable to express a philosophy as sceptically anti-romantic as a philosophy may well be.

Do not be too hasty to pigeon-hole a writer! How easy, for instance, it is to pigeon-hole Bernard Shaw in terms of his "Mrs. Warren's Profession," forgetting Caesar's address to the Sphinx, the great speech on platonic love in "Getting Married," or Lilith's epilogue in "Back to Methuselah," all examples of philosophic, almost mystical poetry. How easy it is to pigeon-hole Sinclair Lewis as a savage caricaturist, blind to the fact that his caricature is only the method of the hurt idealist who would have our America so much finer and lovelier than it is. The man who named his first-born son after H. G. Wells is not of the company of Dean Swift.

Nevertheless patterns are helpful, if one does

not take them too seriously. It will be helpful, perhaps, to divide all Gaul into three parts, all story tellers, whether poets or dramatists or novelists, into three classes: the Yarn-spinners, the Ideologists, and, the Artists, or, better, the Artist-Philosophers, to distinguish them from mere craftsmen.

The Yarn-Spinners

The Yarn-spinners are the least complex and the most numerous. They are the story tellers pure and simple, who are sufficiently observant of and interested in life to want to tell stories about it, but who are interested more in individual instances than in generalizations. They write to entertain themselves and others. The easiest modern statement of their point of view is to be found in a volume called "The Novel: What It Is" by that facile and interesting story teller F. Marion Crawford. His characterization of the novel as "a pocket theatre" gives the clue, so long as you remember that the phrase was written before the days of Shaw and Galsworthy. He means the theatre of Sardou. The novel (or play or poem) should be a story about people, intended to be entertaining, aimed at the heart and studiously neglectful of ideas and generalizations. It should not usurp the place of the pulpit, the editorial

page or the school room. It should make no pretensions to being what it is not. Homer set the pattern (this is my gloss not Crawford's) and no "tendency" novelist has ever surpassed him.

This, of course, is and always will be the most popular pattern of imaginative literature. Those who underrate it do so because they are thinking only of the hordes of wretched craftsmen who degrade the art, people like the author of "The Sheik" and of "Three Weeks," the cheap, the sensational and superficial; the Hall Caines and Marie Corellis and E. P. Roes of the past, the Harold Bell Wrights of the present. It is not the *genre* but the talent which is lacking. "East Lynne" in theme and fable had potentialities worthy of Dickens but lacked a Dickens in the writing. What ranks "Under the Red Robe" below "The Three Musketeers" is not necessarily the material but the handling. What makes "Romola" a great novel and "Richard Yea-and-Nay" only a good one is not the material or even the technic but the quality of mind and imagination that engineered both. George du Maurier lacked only a little of being a Thackeray, but that little was conclusive.

Against these one may set that large group of stories which are no more and no less than stories but which each in its own way are perfect. "Moll

Flanders," "The Vicar of Wakefield," "Pride and Prejudice," "Pendennis," "Barchester Towers," "Lorna Doone," "Kidnapped," "Sentimental Tommy," "Kim"; "A Modern Instance," "Les Grandissimes," "The Red Badge of Courage," "Ethan Frome," "Java Head," "A Lost Lady"; "Colomba," "Pierre and Jean," "Kings in Exile," "Taras Bulba," "Gösta Berling," "Dame Care," "The Three Cornered Hat." I pick these at random, as they flash into the memory, simply as examples of story telling for the tale's sake without ulterior motive. And with them some of those minor works that missed importance but that one remembers happily for one's sheer pleasure in the story: "Trilby," "Tartarin of Tarascon," "The Moonstone," "Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine," "The Light That Failed," "The Orphan Angel," "Thunder on the Left"—books that have not a single thing in common, but the memory still tastes their flavor.

The Ideologists

Increasingly, however, the writers seem not to be content to tell stories. They wish to express ideas, to preach, to argue, to dramatize pamphlets. A hundred years ago one saw that tendency in Dickens and Victor Hugo, although they were magnificent story tellers as well. Yet they

could hardly tell a story without using it as a vehicle for their own brands of ardent humanitarianism. That feeling, of which Thackeray was completely free, and Flaubert, dominated them as Zola's scientific passion dominated him. Charles Reade wrote "Put Yourself in His Place" from blue-books on prison reform. George Eliot, a great artist in "Middlemarch" and "Romola," showed herself less the artist and more the debater in "Felix Holt" and "Daniel Deronda," with the result that nobody reads either. Even Turgenev, finest of Russian artists, wrote "Fathers and Sons" and "Smoke" primarily for a social purpose.

Such books range from the elementary "Uncle Tom's Cabin" of Harriet Beecher Stowe and the unsuccessful "medicated novels" of Oliver Wendell Holmes to perhaps the greatest of all twentieth century novels, Rolland's "Jean Cristophe," that tragically unlucky plea for a united European civilization. Here as always it is not the purity and righteousness of purpose that counts but the skill with which the artist can sublimate his spiritual energy into literary power—not at all the same thing. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" is beneath contempt as literature, "Jean Cristophe" worthy of all respect.

In our own day such books are Wells's "The

World of William Clissold," Thomas Mann's "The Magic Mountain" and even Aldous Huxley's "Point Counterpoint" would hardly, to our fathers, seem novels at all, so heavily are they freighted with ideology, just as Tolstoi's "The Kreutzer Sonata" and "Resurrection," powerful as they are, seem to us hardly more than dramatized pamphlets on sex and social justice.

H. G. Wells has never written a line of fiction not in its purpose an exposition or an argument. The early fantastic romances are allegories, the comedies of manners "Kipps" and "Mr. Polly" point a social moral, and even the great stories "Tono-Bungay" and "The New Machiavelli" are studies in social dynamics and not necessarily less fine as novels for all that. Galsworthy's earlier novels and all of his plays are primarily special pleas in the realm of social justice, the sharply pointed pleas of a trained lawyer. In his ripest work, however, "The Forsyte Saga," he drops his special pleading and works by implication.

This word "implication" is the clue to the matter. A novel or a play or a poem is intrinsically no better and no worse than the mere story for being strongly weighted with social surveys and ideas. But it is better or worse as a work of art, it seems to me, in so far as its ideas are explicit in the story or implicit. Wells's worst novels are those of his

middle period which were simply rag-bags of ideas, recipe-books as Hugh Walpole once called them. Shaw's least actable plays are those of his middle period, which have neither the action of his earlier pieces nor the poetry of his later ones but which are mainly argument. Hauptmann's earlier plays, nearly all of Brieux's, Tolstoi's later work are so obviously mere vehicles for special pleading that they suffer immeasurably in comparison with Ibsen, for instance, who never forgot that it was his business to be poet first and ideologist second. The children's books of the early and middle nineteenth century seem horrible to us today because the assafetida of the moral is so thinly smeared with the jelly of the fiction. And yet Lewis Carroll could write a child's fantasy profoundly philosophical in many of its implications without ever distracting us from the charm of the fable.

When Tolstoi wrote "What Is Art" he stated once and for all that doctrine which is latent in the thought of all reformers and censors, that a work of art has no right to exist unless it is written for a moral purpose and only for a moral purpose. Tolstoi stated his case so exactly and extremely that its strict application would undoubtedly rule out most of the existing great literature of the world, from Shakespeare down, and the result

was only that Tolstoi's own age and ours have laughed it out of court. Recently Upton Sinclair, the most sincere and uncompromising of our American ideologists, wrote a book called "Mammonart" which aimed to prove that most of the literature of the world had been produced by the sycophantic slaves of wealth and so was unfit to be read by a class-conscious proletariat. Again Shakespeare is ruled out, this time as an enemy of the people.

The case so stated is easy to disprove. Yet one can name a list of works, indisputably among the greatest, which Tolstoi must accept, The Book of Job, the "Œdipus" and the "Antigone" of Sophocles, "The Divine Comedy," "The Faery Queen," "Paradise Lost," "Clarissa Harlowe," "The New Heloise," "Faust," "Romola," "Ghosts" and "An Enemy of Society," "Anna Karenina," "Jean Cristophe." What is it that divides such works not merely from "Uncle Tom's Cabin" but even from "The New Machiavelli" and "Damaged Goods" and "Getting Married"? It is not that the former group is less explicit, less argumentative than the latter, for certainly most of those great works are explicit and argumentative enough. It is, I suppose, that the imagination which wings the idea is more intense, the vision is clearer and more uncompromising, the form more

perfect. The emotion is great enough to bear the burden of the thought without flagging.

The Artists

But there is a third group which includes perhaps the finest spirits of all, the group I choose to call the Artists, or the Artist-Philosophers. They are not interested in the tale for its own sake, in the surfaces of life, its temporal and local peculiarities. Neither are they interested in temporary modes of thought, in this and that dispute over forms of state and church and social system, in the little slogans of politics, theology or economics. They know, as Kipling does, that these vanish, these maxims of the market place, but that man remains. What the first man and the last man have in common interests them, not what differentiates the two. They know that no shift in *mores* can make Homer out of date, or Horace, or Shakespeare. These deal with the universals of this our life.

They observe life carefully, they brood upon its meaning, they describe it as they see it. And they leave it to you to determine for yourself the significance of their brooding. A Wells argues with you and tells you, a Conrad sees and ponders and describes. Wells leaves you with a notion to quarrel about. Conrad leaves you with a kind of sat-

urated emotion about life, which you may not be able to phrase but which affects you deeply and must in spite of yourself influence all your feeling about life. Here are pictures of our world seen through a temperament. Through their eyes, as Fra Lippo Lippi reminds us, we learn to see things we had not seen before, for our eyes were holden.

I call them Artists because it is their peculiar delight to make beauty out of the raw material of life. Sometimes they make it out of the ugly and sordid, like Flaubert in "Madame Bovary," sometimes out of the tragic and terrible, like Euripides in "The Trojan Women," sometimes out of the grotesque like Cervantes in "Don Quixote," out of the pathological like Dostoievsky. The happiest, like Shakespeare, make it out of all sorts and conditions of life. But whatever their material, the result is beauty. Without argument, often without comment, they show you life as they see it through the glass, crystal or dark, of their temperaments, and we look upon it and see that life is beautiful and that it is good. They alone can show us that life even in defeat is victorious and therefore precious and that there is no beauty like the beauty of death. For many—I had almost said all—of these artists are the tragic poets of the world, who know that the greatest dignity of

man is his bearing in that heroic and foredoomed struggle we call life.

I call them Philosophers, too, for they all are preoccupied with that fundamental problem of philosophy, the problem of evil. The story-tellers avoid it if they can, or treat it superficially; the ideologists seem to think it can be abrogated by whatever act they fancy of synod or of parliament. But the artist-philosophers seem to know instinctively that it is the great cross-word puzzle of life and that their business above all else is to try to fill in the letters to make sense. They are not systematic philosophers. They do not attempt to treat imaginatively the system of an Aquinas like Dante, of a Calvin like Milton, of a Spencer like Hardy. Out of all of Shakespeare's plays or Conrad's novels or Browning's poems you can not build a systematic philosophy. All you will find are a galaxy of separate passages, intuitive often rather than rational, immediate in their context, poignant and intense in their phrasing, universal in their application. And out of them all a *mood,* which for common human use will wear better than the most exact metaphysic.

The Roll of Honor

Who are some of these strong spirits who have winged as far as the imagination may wing? The

two Homers—he, sceptical and witty and pathetic, who wrote the "Iliad," and he, sober and responsible and truthful, who wrote the "Odyssey"; the Æschylus who wrote of "Prometheus Bound"; the Sophocles who reminds us in the "Œdipus" that ignorance of the law excuses no man and in the "Antigone" that man must obey his conscience rather than the statutes; the Euripides of "The Trojan Women" and the "Bacchæ"; the unknown authors of Job and Ecclesiastes; Chaucer and Cervantes, William Shakespeare,—then a long gap, for such spirits found no air to breathe for two centuries—Goethe, Balzac, Browning, the younger Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, Hardy and Conrad, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Mark Twain. In our own day, perhaps Rolland, perhaps Galsworthy, perhaps Theodore Dreiser.

One of the tests of this greatness is to see a work of the imagination which may start trivially ending magnificently, as life lays hold on the writer and almost without his volition his characters live, too. The "Iliad" begins pettily enough and the "Odyssey" mechanically, but as we read on we are thrilled to recognize, with Chesterton, that "the 'Iliad' is great because all life is a battle and the 'Odyssey' is great because all life is a journey." Cervantes, Henry Fielding and Dickens all began great books as burlesques, but before we

leave the Don and Mr. Pickwick we know that their authors had recognized them as immortals and that even Joseph Andrews was more than merely his sister's preposterous brother. That inspired energy that carried Mark Twain from Tom Sawyer to the great picaresque Huckleberry Finn was the same strength that forced Galsworthy to see how in "The Man of Property" he had only thrown a stone and set in motion ripples that must go on widening for fifty years until they reach the shore and the end. Your yarn-spinner spins a plot and his work is almost done; your ideologist briefs an argument and has only to set it in motion; but your artist is dealing with life itself and he alone knows the strength of the Dæmon he wrestles with to exact a blessing.

All categories overlap. Some of you will, perhaps, be bothered to find some of the same names listed on page 178 as the great idealogists and on page 182 as great artist-philosophers. I can't help it. There they are. Almost they defy category. That is why they are supreme. Homer is simple enough to fit neatly into Crawford's definition and yet profound enough to escape all definition. In some of the others the temporary perishes and the eternal is left. Dante and Milton as theologians no longer interest us, as poets we still try to see with their eyes. The Hardy of Tess

and Jude lives, the Hardy of "The Dynasts" (great as he is) gathers dust on the shelves. In Galsworthy there are times when the legal sociologist out-shouts the poet; there are other times (his best) when he seems as great as Conrad. Browning's all too simple and eupeptic concept of God and immortality bothers us until we recognize in "The Ring and the Book" that his practice is far more profound than his theory. And so it goes.

Breathing Spell

This is about all I can do to show you the workings of the critic's and the artists's nature. You will have found it sketchy, incomplete, and (probably) contradictory. But it is as near as I can come to giving you some idea of the nature of the beast, for they are curious animals, all these dreamers who are not content to take the world as it is but must forever be trying to see it more sharply, feel it more deeply, interpret it more surely, remould it nearer to the heart's desire, or make it appear more logical and reasonable than it really is.

Enough, then, about the spirit that peers out at you between the bars of print. For authoring is a trick and a trade as well as an inspiration, the breath of the Dæmon. And each form of writing,

the novel, the play, the poem, and all the rest, has its own peculiar tricks.

The next and last main section, therefore, must say something about what it is you are to look for in the *method* of fiction and drama, the strategy and tactics, as G. P. Baker calls them in his admirable book "Dramatic Technique" (Houghton, Mifflin). I have no time for details, but there are certain generalizations which may help to make reading swifter, surer, and more nourishing.

Part IV

THE MATERIAL

CHAPTER XI

The Novel and the Short Story

FOR my purposes the differences between the novel and the short story are negligible. Only in their tactics are they different; their strategy is unescapably the same. There is no esoteric mystery about the short story which needs particular attention. A competent artist, one who knows his job, should be able to function freely in both fields.

The "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" differ from all other primitive stories in possessing nearly all that we look for in modern fiction. But all other early story telling—the Old Testament, for instance—concentrates on the narrative. There is little background and only elementary character portrayal. Virtually no character analysis. Early fiction is behavioristic, whether it is the Book of Esther or "The Song of Roland." The narrative drives ahead plainly and without too much detail against a background only dimly glimpsed and with characters, at the worst puppets, at the best types. You must make up your mind about them from what they do and from what they (scantily) say. The

poet does not help you to make up your mind about them. Maupassant and Kipling try for this simplicity, not always successfully. Ernest Hemingway almost achieves it in, say, a story like "The Killers."

Sausage Link and Woven Plot

The story recounts briefly an event. Early books of fiction are hardly more than collections of separate anecdotes, the books of Ruth and Tobit, the "Decameron," the "Gesta Romanorum." When the longer story makes its appearance it is an episodic chronicle, a string of incidents hung on the thread of a personality, the stories of Joseph, David, Siegfried, Arthur. The method is that of a string of sausages. It is compound, almost never complex. "The Arabian Nights" is a collection of such sausage-link narratives. The so-called picaresque novel, the adventures of a rogue, is the same method in more sophisticated hands; "Gil Blas," "Roxana," "Joseph Andrews." Some of the greatest novels of the world have little plotting other than this serial manipulation of time: "Don Quixote," "Pickwick Papers," "Huckleberry Finn," "An Old Wives Tale," "The Way of All Flesh." "Elmer Gantry" is a recent, less great, example. Today we call it the biographical novel.

The second form of narrative is the dramatic. The sausage-link story may be dramatic within the episode but not as a whole. But the dramatic story weaves a plot, shows us a group of characters involved in a particular situation who work through that situation to a climax and stop. The sausage-link story unrolls and opens up continuously; the dramatic tightens steadily, draws in upon itself, concentrates to a climax. Its technique is exactly that of the "well made" play. Its characters are few as in a play, not numerous as in a chronicle. This method is most successful in the shorter novels, "The Scarlet Letter," "The Warden," "Victory," "Ethan Frome." In the long novels like "Pendennis" and "The Forsyte Saga" it is almost inevitably diluted with the chronicle method, only towards the end drawing itself together for the climax. Yet George Eliot in "Romola" and Hugo in "Notre Dame" show astonishing power in keeping the story always concentrated on the main theme.

Generally speaking the English and Russian novel have always been looser and more episodic, the French more dramatic and concentrated. The modern novel, except the biographical, is frankly dramatic. The curtain goes up in the middle of things and drops at the end definitively, the situation resolved. The elder novelist used to ease you

into a story and let you know what happened afterwards. The modern writer cares no more about what comes of his characters than the playwright does. In "Pygmalion" Bernard Shaw found this so unsatisfactory that he had to supplement his play with the last chapter of an old fashioned novel.

These two ways of plotting are the only ways. They are found in the beginning as well as today. Both the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" show a firm nucleus of dramatic plotting much diluted by the episodic. The Book of Esther is tightly dramatic. The "Niebelungenlied" is episodic but twice coiling into tight drama. "Moll Flanders" is purely episodic and "Pickwick Papers"; "Richard Feveral" and "The Return of the Native" are purely dramatic. "Ulysses" exhibits no plot, only sequences, while "Remembrance of Things Past," endless as it is, is plotted on a gigantic scale.

Setting

You will look in vain for setting among the old Hebrew stories. There is place identification and little more. The same is true of the "Song of Roland" and Boccaccio's stories. Homer has a strong sense of pictorial background and great descriptive power. The mediæval writers slight it. Those of the Renaissance are often elaborate,

the Augustans reduce it to a conventional formula. Only with the coming of the romanticists does it proliferate until you sometimes cannot see the story for the trees.

Roughly, the classicists and pseudo-classicists keep the background in its place. Their treatment of it is concise, impersonal, however clear and exact. The human protagonist in the foreground is emphasized, nature is only the stage on which he struts. The background in "Robinson Crusoe" is solid and exact enough, but it never draws your interest away from the hero as it does in "Green Mansions" and "Heart of Darkness." These are romantic.

The romanticist is responsible for most of the exaggerations in the treatment of Setting. He loads the dice. To him nature is alive, conscious almost, imminent. Her moods are often more important than the moods of man. In unskillful hands this gives rise to the "pathetic fallacy" which Ruskin criticized, wherein nature smiles, weeps, threatens, soothes and exalts in sympathy with or in contrast to the emotions of the human actors. In more skillful hands it gives us the sea in Hugo's "Toilers" and Conrad's "Typhoon," Hardy's Egdon Heath in "The Return of the Native" where it dominates the book, Jack London's hostile Alaska, Willa Cather's New Mexico.

Not merely does the romanticist throw his human action into sharp relief against nature in a way Shakespeare would have understood but Defoe never, but he shows man as wax under nature's stamp. The numberless stories that show white men disintegrating in the tropics furnish an easy illustration. Robinson Crusoe in the tropics remains, like Gilbert's sailor, an Englishman. But Maugham's missionary in "Rain" goes to hell. All local color stories, of the bayou, the plains, the mountains, New England, Virginia, New York City, exhibit the background as moulding the human personality. Upton Sinclair writes a whole novel to prove that Boston is a peculiarly terrible influence.

The most detailed modern realism usually shows this subjective and emotional treatment of nature. Zola was full of it and Frank Norris. Sinclair Lewis treats Gopher Prairie and Zenith City almost as Byron would. Only Theodore Dreiser keeps the setting in its place in the fashion of Defoe and Jane Austen and even, for all his encyclopædic detail, Balzac. Galsworthy and Hugh Walpole have a strong sense of place; their moonlights and twilights, their country houses and city streets are dangerous places for sensitive souls to be about in. The romantic treatment has so far prevailed that we feel that the other is nig-

gardly and unhelpful. Yet there are strong reasons for believing that the earlier method is the safer and more wholesome. It is far less liable to distortion, to throwing a story out of focus. The other is literary animism, that most primitive attitude toward the mystery of life.

Characterization

You can do without background in a story. But you cannot do without people, unless, like Kipling, you substitute animals or machinery. A story is, after all, one or more people doing something.

In the beginning, as I said above, the author gives you no help about his characters. Think how much easier it would be to understand the complex and contradictory David of Israel if the chronicler had made a guess or two about him. But no, all we have is the record, and parsons have been quarreling about the significance of the various episodes ever since. Homer does better for us. There is always an epithet or two to tell us what he thinks about Odysseus or Penelope or Hector.

The behavioristic method, that of speech and action without comment, remains as simple and self sufficing today as when the first tribal poet conceived it. But the other has grown from the simple epithet of Homer to the meticulous detail of a Henry James or a Marcel Proust, not merely

the exhibition of speech and action, but the fullest gloss, description, and analysis of what the character intended, how he carried out his intention, and what it all meant.

Whether the character described in either of these two ways comes out of the oven a type or an individual is a matter of the author's comprehension not of his method. If he sees people in plain outlines and rough masses, of a small number of varieties, if he is interested more in their resemblances than in their differences, he will draw what we call types. You will recognize these most easily in the old comedies where they have names to match: Joseph Surface the hypocrite, Captain Deuceace the gambler, Sir Tunbelly Clumsy the boor, Lady Pliant, Sir John Brute, Sir Benjamin Backbite, Snake (a newspaper man), Captain Manly (the hero), Sir Willoughby Patterne—and all the rest. It is the peculiar glory of William Shakespeare in an age when types held the stage that, save for an occasional and minor Toby Belch, he created and named his characters as individuals. I defy you to put Falstaff into a type category, or Hamlet. Chaucer, too, created unmistakable individuals for the personages of his famous prologue.

It is not a matter of detail. Many of the characters of Homer, drawn with a single line, are

individuals, as are those of the Old Testament. And many of the personages of a modern story, loaded with detail as they are, S. S. Van Dyne's Philo Vance, for instance, remain elementary types. Tricks of saying or doing the same thing constantly will often give you a clue, though you must not be too sure. Sherlock Holmes was a repetitive sort of person but for all that an individual. That the great public takes to its heart a personage and talks about him as if he were a person is the best proof that the author has succeeded in creating an individual. Dickens's success in that respect, so long as he was universally read, was extraordinary. Thackeray's major character's were real and familiar but not his minor ones, whereas even Dickens's passing figures were originals.

The most minute analysis of today often only shows up a figure as a type. One test may help. If the author seems to get at a figure from the inside, intuitionally, it is probably an individual; if you feel the character is merely being observed from without, as a specimen, it is doubtless only an old type in a new dress. On the whole, however modern characters are more likely to be more highly individualized than those of the past century. We do know a little more about psychology than our fathers did, even if much of what we

know, in the words of Artemus Ward, "aint so."

The one great error of the romantic age in characterization is thoroughly out of fashion today. I mean the author's habit of coming round in front of the puppet booth and talking about his characters, frankly acknowledging them as fictitious, and speculating in our hearing as to what he had better do with them. That irritating habit of Thackeray and Trollope and Du Maurier bothers us no more. Fiction is treated like history, as Henry James insisted it should be.

Presentation Old and New

Fashions in the telling change. Mr. Ernest E. Leisy in a new book "American Literature" (T. Y. Crowell Co.) characterizes our age as one of "convention, revolt, and general chaos." These last words mean, I suspect, that he is bothered by not being able to fit new methods into old categories. For the tactics change from year to year. Some that we pride ourselves on as newest are age-old. David W. Griffith's flash-back is the device by which Homer rouses our interest in the "Odyssey," the same as that which Marcel Proust uses at such tedious length in "Remembrance of Things Past." Indeed the whole ten volumes are hardly more than one continuous flash-back.

The close-up, that device that halts an action

to pay attention to some one aspect of it, is as old. There are no close-ups in the somewhat mechanical rapidity of the action in the Old Testament, but in Homer the scenes of Hector's parting with Andromache and of Odysseus's visit to Hell have all the quality of the modern emphasis. Indeed the modern novel is often little more than a series of close-ups rather than plain narrative.

One of our modern devices is only the closer integration of an old one. The so-called "stream of consciousness" method shows us a character stationary in time while life flows past reflected in his consciousness. We do not look at life directly but only through the eyes of the personage. He remembers, he experiences, he looks forward. "To the Lighthouse" is one example, "Dead Lovers Are Faithful Lovers" and "Many Marriages" still others. The method is nothing more than the analysis of George Eliot, carried a step further by Henry James, and now carried so far by James Joyces and others that it is continuous instead of episodic. With Henry James analysis stopped momentarily while action flowed. Nowadays action and analysis are both continuous or, rather, action exists only in analysis. Yet this method, elaborate and tedious as it often is, is no more than the logical development of the simplest primitive comment on a character's thought or

motive. "Therefore Sarah laughed *within herself, saying,* After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure?" The moment the poet attempts this he has taken the step which removes narrative forever from the plain objective description that says without comment "Thus he spoke, and leaped into the battle."

For man is not long content with the single statement, and one suspects that the attempt of recent artists to revive it is more the affectation of novelty than aught else. It is the business of imaginative literature to interpret life as well as to describe it. And the more complex it seems, the more we are put to it to find devices to express that complexity.

The first step is the device of the authors of the "Odyssey" and "Robinson Crusoe" and "Tono-Bungay," of seeking to unpack the heart of at least one person's mystery by telling the story in the first person. This illuminates one personage but leaves all the others as flat and opaque as in a tale by Boccaccio. So Richardson and Rousseau, among others, improve on Defoe by telling their stories by means of letters, whereby the adventures of Pamela or the new Heloise are told from many points of view. But these points of view, however much they may overlap, are only successive not simultaneous and so do not really help the diffi-

culty. The natural remedy is, of course, the swing to what we call the omniscient method, the most frequently practiced modern method, in which the author assumes the place of God, sees all, knows all, understands all, simultaneously.

This would seem as near as we can come to completeness not only of presentation but of interpretation, but the difficulty is not solved. The author is not God. The story still remains the point of view of one person pretending to be omniscient, still remains a silhouette. Zola trusts that he can get round the difficulty by building his story only on observed and recorded fact, blind to the fact that the author's will and fancy are at work to nullify any value a really objective record of fact would have.

Conrad and Proust

So Joseph Conrad takes a new tack. We do not, he says, ever know an event completely, as God may be conceived to know it. All our sense of fact is strained through temperaments, our own and those of others. The only significance of an event we can ever grasp is its composite significance to several people. So he tries to give us the inner significance of "Youth" by letting an old man tell a story of an adventure of his as a young man, thus getting two angles, like a stereoscope, instead of

one. And in "Chance" he lets two people tell the story, a young man who does not understand its significance and an older man who, hearing only the younger man's story at second hand, does try to interpret for us what it means to him. Neither knows all the events, there are gaps in the readers' knowledge of fact, but with guesses and surmises Captain Marlow pulls us through—so that at the last we know the story just as we know any story in life, at second hand, a bit blurred and incomplete and contradictory, but all that we shall ever know.

Marcel Proust tries to solve the difficulty in another way. Any present fact, he feels, has no significance in itself. Its only meaning lies in the association it calls up in the memory. Any event is only the last word of a long, complex, integrated periodic sentence which is our whole experience. And so he writes "Remembrance of Things Past," in which the story marches very slowly, with long halts for parenthetic retrospect, but so surely that the last chapter gathers the whole ten volumes into its slow climax—and lo, there is the meaning of the book.

This is a far cry from "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and probably not so satisfactory as a method, but it is an old and ineluctable habit of young vintners to insist

on new bottles for what they imagine is new wine, though the grapes be as old as time. The style of the eighteenth century was a perfect dress for the most orderly and symmetrical of periods, but when young Mr. Scott Fitzgerald wished to express his sense of the chaos in which the college graduate of 1917 found himself he found he could do it only by jazzing "This Side of Paradise" out of all resemblance to a formal well-bred novel. In the same way the ingenious and observant Mr. J. P. McEvoy writes "Show Girl" and its sequel in narrative form, dramatic form, stream of consciousness, telegrams, newspaper articles, greeting cards, movie scenario scripts, and minutes of the last meeting. An extraordinarily happy and persuasive way of making us see and feel the life he is interpreting.

The Short Story

Even the short story has caught the infection. Everything I have said in this chapter applies as much to the short story as to the novel. The first short story was only an anecdote. Later it was a kind of tabloid novelette, with all the elements in miniature. Then Poe preached the gospel of striking a note and holding it, concentrating on plot, or character, or setting, or idea, without spreading the story too thin over them all. The note was

brevity, crispness, intensity, unity. The stories of Maupassant and the younger Kipling perhaps set a high water mark here.

Then the influence of Stevenson, Henry James, and Conrad gives us the long short story, almost a short novel, save that it has the emphasis which comes from a single intense situation developed generously. The habit of our magazines of running short stories interminably like rivers between canyons of advertisements stretches the commercial short story thin and thinner, until the technic of Maupassant is diluted beyond recognition. It becomes mechanized, built on a formula so exact that it can be taught by correspondence.

Then another, our present reaction. We learn from Chekhov and his young, too soon dead, disciple Katherine Mansfield, that form hardly matters, that a short story may be anything in form so long as the mood is thoroughly persuasive. The Bret Harte, Kipling, O. Henry technic goes by the boards and in its place we have "The Doll House" and "The Garden Party," in which the story hardly matters so that all three dimensions—nay, four dimensions—of life be suggested. Hardly have we learned to relish this when Mr. Ernest Hemingway sends us all back to the stripped and naked anecdote of Boccaccio.

The Lost Virtue of Simplicity

These, then, are the ways of telling a story. Which one is used does not matter. "Every single one of them is right," so long as it is persuasive, so long as for the moment it creates in you "that willing suspension of disbelief" which is the purpose of imaginative literature.

Other things being equal, the simple way is still best. Our age's dread of being "old hat," our inability to see that the utmost originality is consistent with the oldest and simplest form, is responsible, in the plastic arts and music as well as in literature, for much of the technic that seems to the layman so difficult and perverse as hardly to reward the trouble necessary for its proper appreciation. There is no doubt that increasingly much of our imaginative literature takes on the aspect of problem in mathematics or physics. It is enormously clever, subtle, original and completely cerebral. It strives for new effects and misses, thereby, much of the old effectiveness.

After all no one has ever told a story much better than Homer did, or Defoe, or Thackeray, or Mark Twain. Their methods were not so different from that of one who tells a story to children. Modern education insists that the children both as artists and critics possess something that

we lose too easily as we grow up. Shades of the prison house close on us too certainly and too soon. Malory and Dumas may well outlive all our cleverest patternmakers.

Nevertheless, we must know the literature of our day. And the more exact our comprehension of the tricks of the modern trade the more we may appreciate the spontaneous and natural, unselfconscious art of those craftsmen whose craft is for the moment out of fashion. For no game can give us any pleasure unless we know something of how it is played.

Notebook

Let us be specific for a moment. What are the questions a reader should ask himself about a work of fiction to help his own analysis?

Narrative: Is the story long and loose or short and close-knit? Are the episodes links in a chronicle held together by one or more continuing personages, with a large cast of characters in the background? Or does a small group of characters work out a single situation, narrowing always in towards the climax for which the plot was woven. Or is it a chronicle which contains several dramatic episodes complete in themselves?

Setting: Is nature merely a background? Might

the background be anywhere, so to speak, or is this background necessary for this tale? Does setting shape the characters and therefore their actions? Is the setting shaped by the characters? Is the background impersonal and photographic or is it romantic, that is, are its moods important for the story? Does the pathetic fallacy betray our sense of fact?

Characterization: Is the character a type or an individual? Or, to be more subtle, in Balzac's words, is he an individualized type, or a typical individual? Is he an allegorical or symbolic figure? Does he initiate action, as in all romantic stories, or is he the instrument of such forces as heredity and environment, as in much modern realistic writing? Has he free-will or is he a mechanism? Is he static or does he develop? Do we have to guess at him merely by observing him in speech and action (behaviorism), or is he explained for us by analysis of his motive and comment on his behavior?

Presentation: Does the story present one or many points of view in the telling? If in the third person does the point of view shift (a rather inartistic device), or is it held strictly within the limits of one person's knowledge? Is it told in the first person, or does it present many points of

view by means of letters? Or is it in the impersonal, omniscient third person that knows all things simultaneously. If the story is told in the third person, does the person move and develop with the action, or is he static, a glass through which we see the moving world? Is the story straightforward or does it double back on itself with flashbacks? Is it pure narrative, or does it tell its story in a series of elaborate scenes (close-ups) held together by rapid and perfunctory narrative?

Significance: Is the story primarily one of character, of setting and mood, of plot, or of theme? Is the story told for its own sake, as an interesting anecdote affecting only the actors, or is it symbolic, that is, a specific illustration of a greater truth? Is it a study in individual character, in human society, or in clashing ideas? Is it a problem story, telling you a story and leaving you to think out the answer for yourself; or is it a thesis story, which states a proposition and argues it through to its conclusion? Does the significance lie in its factual exactness or in its deeper meaning? Is the presentation matter of fact, idealistic, ironic, or satiric, and how significant is this mood of telling? Does it persuade you of its truth while you are reading it?

These are some of the questions you should get into the habit of asking yourself while you read. Many of them apply equally well to the play discussed in the next chapter. They are necessary questions if you hope to have anything more than a kind of emotional blur about what you read. Specific analysis is always the first step towards the greater understanding we call synthesis.

CHAPTER XII

The Play

THE play is the only form of literature which is not self-sufficient. The poet and the novelist can speak directly to his reader. The page once printed suffers no distortion. But between the dramatist and his audience stand a number of people, all trying to be helpful and all interfering dreadfully. The producer, director and stage manager, each with his notion of what he wants the play to be like; a group of assorted actors determined to exploit their personalities and make the play simply a setting for their talents; scene designers and stage carpenters and electricians with their notions of design and form and light, the composer insistent upon a certain kind of musical obligato to the scene. All these "experts" stand determinedly between you and the author. Even the restaurant waiter and the taxi-driver may, before ever the curtain rises, ruin your mood for whatever you are going to see.

So much is acted drama at the mercy of the incompetent and irrelevant. That is why Gordon Craig insists that the actor is a temperamental

nuisance and must be reduced to the status of a puppet in the director's hands so that he may not spoil the pre-determined mood with his egotisms. He would have even the author subordinate to the *regisseur*. A mere intelligent precaution was that of the late Clyde Fitch, who insisted for his own protection that he be allowed to choose his casts and rehearse them. For this reason, doubtless, the flavor and the detail of a Fitch production were always notable.

Wresting the Scriptures

Directors, both good and bad, are alchemists of sorts. They can turn lead into gold and gold into lead. A good director can take an undistinguished script and accent and balance it so beautifully, mould the plastic actors so skillfully, that the piece itself seems beautiful and skillful. And a ham director, one who has in his day been a ham actor, can blunt and distort and vulgarize a fine thing and set it out upon the stage in his own image, not the poet's. I have seen a piece fundamentally a preposterous melodrama done in so matter-of-fact a way as to deceive the inexperienced into accepting it as fact, and I have seen a delicate comedy done as broadly as to resemble sheer farce.

For this reason it is more difficult for the ama-

teur to criticize a play seen than a play read. Particularly if he is one of those who lets his emotions run away from him, he will be so impressed with the vividness of what he sees that it will for the moment be real to him. He will be unable to discern the *play* beneath the production, and will therefore be entirely unable to understand how an experienced critic can dismiss as tawdry stuff something which has seemed to him genuine. Or he will fail to discern a fine work of the imagination simply because the settings and acting are third rate.

I have also found, somewhat to my surprise, a widespread inability to distinguish between the actor and the character he portrays. Film reviews take this into account when they tell the story of a film, using the names of the actors rather than of the personages. The fact that an actor or actress can distort a piece out of all truth by an ill-considered impersonation is a new idea to many play-goers. Maude Adams, for instance, was temperamentally incapable of presenting the taciturn and unattractive Maggie Wiley in Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows" as any other but the most utterly charming and romantic figure, so that one was left blankly wondering what the play was all about. Walter Hampden, so scholarly and reflective as Hamlet, deadened immeasurably his por-

trayal of the brusque and gasconading Cyrano by playing him in much the same key, the key of *his* temperament not Cyrano's. One will not soon forget the spectacle of the sinister George Arliss trying to be light and breezy and western in "The Mollusc." Mrs. Fiske similarly grieved the judicious by attempting to treat the sombre and anxious Mrs. Alving in her own method, to which F. P. A. once applied the adjectives "staccato, intermittent, cascading, choppy, brittle"—the method of high comedy, not of tragedy.

The Eye and the Ear

But I am in this book talking about reading plays, not seeing them. This is perhaps just as well, for it takes advantage of the saddest fact about our American theatre, that it is almost impossible to see new plays properly presented outside of New York and a small number of large cities. The dweller in the country or the small city must either travel to the metropolis, or depend on the stereotypes of the local stock company or the arty uncertainties of the local little theatres. Many stock companies and little theatres are excellent, many more are abortions. Or he will depend on the movies and the talking movies. About this latter development I will say nothing as they are yet in too larval a state for proper estimate.

Suffice it to say that they are unquestionably even now, however raucous, nearer to true drama than the silent movies can ever be.

The eagerness and determination to develop the talking movie shows how deeply seated is the feeling that the old movie lacks one of the greatest aids to dramatic effect—sound. Drama is the synthesis of all the arts. It is not merely dialogue and action; it is painting and sculpture in motion, as Vachel Lindsay said in his fine pioneering book "The Art of the Moving Picture." It is flow and pattern, color and sound; but above all it is sound. The effect of sound on our nerves is probably far greater than that of sight.

This brings us to the first capital difficulty in reading plays. One must not merely visualize but audibilize, a word unfortunately not in my dictionary. To take an instance, the most effective single scene in Galsworthy's "Justice" is a piece of dumb-show showing John Falder in his cell at twilight. There is no dialogue, only a page of stage directions which may be skimmed in a minute. But to skim is to miss entirely the intended effect. One must see and hear in the imagination. First, the huge menacing shadow of the prisoner that he sees with a cry of fear as the light in the corridor suddenly blazes into his cell. Second, the nerve-wracking noise of the other prisoners down the

corridor banging on the iron bars. The noise creeps nearer, it surrounds him, until finally he, too, loses his self-control and falls to beating on the metal. No reading can reproduce the electrical effect of this on the stage, but a careful reading and a self-conscious will-to-imagine can give something of the emotional effect Galsworthy so needed to get over to us. Similarly the lighted lamp smashing against the closing door, the climax of Strindberg's "The Father." Similarly the screaming oath, the pistol shot and the crash of glass as the pistol is hurled into the conservatory in Clyde Fitch's "The City." These are intended to give you that bodily tingling which is one of the signs of a successful appreciation of the arts. Mere cerebral comprehension is the least part, as Emily Dickinson pointed out by implication her famous definition of poetry.

You must *hear* the dialogue of a play. I remember an old film of Ibsen's "A Doll's House" which was a complete failure because the occasional subtitles could give no adequate idea of the emotional effect produced by the give and take of the dialogue. Take those climactic sentences—

Helmer: No man sacrifices his honor even for one he loves.

Nora: Millions of women have done so!

You must *hear* those words or your imagina-

tion must make you hear them. I can still remember how Viola Allen's voice broke and died away to a horrible croak as Imogene in "Cymbeline" unsuspectingly reads the letter which tells her of her husband's death. And Maude Adams's, as Peter Pan cried "I'm the sunrise, I'm poets singing, I'm the little bird just broken out of the egg. . . . I'm joy, joy, joy!" Who would not wish to hear that voice of Garrick in "Hamlet" which so frightened Partridge? In our imagination we can hear it yet.

Every Reader His Own Producer

Reading a play demands a conscious exercise of the imagination which reading a novel does not demand. The good novelist does most of your work for you. He tells you everything, the aspects and moods of nature, how the heroine looks and is robed and bears herself, how men act and the effect of their action. He describes, compares, analyzes, annotates, sums up. In comparison how little help the dramatist gives us on the printed page. A list of characters very briefly described, a few stage directions, and the dialogue. Ibsen does hardly more. Shakespeare did even less. One play of his contains the words *Actus primus, scaena prima* and no other stage direction. Those in our reading editions are largely modern glosses. It

was to help the average modern person unaccustomed to reading plays that Bernard Shaw invented his preface and his elaborate stage directions, thus popularizing, in the words of William Archer, "a bastard but highly diverting form of art." Granville Barker and Eugene O'Neill have carried the method so far as to be tedious. This proliferation of comment is helpful to the reader of a printed play but harmful to the dramatist, as he comes to rely on his stage directions to do work which his dialogue ought solely to do. Barker's "The Madras House" reads as amusingly as a novel but is hardly successful in what a stage play demands, simplicity, directness, and pace. In O'Neill's "Strange Interlude" the play is almost drowned in emotional stage direction, most of it unnecessary.

You must read a play slowly. Pace is enormously important on the stage. Pauses often give effects as important as speech or action. Barrie has been praised as being unusual in his ability to obtain dramatic effects from taciturnity and even silence. The opening of "What Every Woman Knows" must be savored slowly to get the value of these effects. Similarly in many of Shaw's speeches, that of Napoleon in "The Man of Destiny" or John Tanner's oratorical efforts in "Man and Superman," one must not lose the headlong

effect of the *tirade,* the technic of which Shaw has praised himself for reviving from the classic comedy. See the stage in your mind's eye, allow time for movement of the personages across it, and try to catch the pace the writer had in his mind.

The Playwright's Difficulties

There is another reason for reading slowly. Nothing in a play may with impunity be skipped. A novelist has all the time he wants at his disposal. He may go backward four generations. He may expand one moment of anguish into pages of analysis. He may make conversations as long and as tedious as they are in real life. But the dramatist cannot afford to be so leisurely. He has at most two and a half hours, excluding entr'acts, in which to tell his story. I am assuming that we are not considering that Chinese play that takes the evenings of six months to perform, or even "Back to Methuselah." In this time he must make all the antecedent action clear, start a story, develop it to a climax, and tie the ending knot. This demands great sense of selection, arrangement and emphasis. Nothing remains but the indispensable. Every word must tell. This is what Galsworthy means when he says the dialogue must be hand-made like lace. A bad dramatist can be told by his irrelevancies. Even fine dramatists like Barker and

O'Neill blur their effects by their long-windedness. A skillful novel-reader may skim and almost skip with impunity. But the more skillful the play-reader the more he knows that he skips at his peril. Every speech counts. That is why "cuttings" of plays by ambitious elocutionists are only too often botched and unintelligible affairs.

This necessary brevity and compactness does give rise to one difficulty in drama for which you must allow. The most serious criticism made against Ibsen's "A Doll's House" is that which insists that Nora's mental and spiritual development is far too rapid. In the first act she is the little bird, the playful, fibbing, irresponsible child-wife. In the last she is the strong-willed, purposeful, intelligent woman. The elapsed time is only a few days. Compare that with Flaubert's leisurely study of Emma Bovary's moral disintegration, which takes years. Here *is* a capital difficulty. The well-made play must deal with a crisis over a short period of time and yet must show changes in the characters. In the drama as in the novel the absolutely static character is unsatisfactory. You must grant, therefore, the dramatist a kind of poetic license you do not have to grant the novelist, and you must take his word for it that his somewhat ideal, compressed treatment of time is sufficient to allow for major changes in human character. On

the stage, with skillful actors, he will probably convince you. On the printed page you must give him the benefit of the doubt.

Plain and Yet Sensational

A successful play must necessarily be more plain and direct than a successful novel. The playwright who subtilizes overmuch is lost. The reason for this is plain. A crowd is always more stupid than the individuals composing it. It is slow at the uptake, as the Scotch say. Was it Wilkie Collins or Charles Reade or Tom Taylor?—it doesn't matter much—who said of dramatic composition: "Tell 'em you're going to say it, tell 'em you're saying it, then tell 'em you've said it—and possibly they'll grasp it." That is why Browning, Meredith and Henry James all failed as playwrights. The dialogue of "The Egoist" or "The Wings of the Dove" is intolerable on the stage. Granville Barker pushed subtlety so far once in "The Marrying of Ann Leete" that the play is incomprehensible. On the stage you often need a baldness you would resent in a novel.

Similarly the stage needs a more sensational phrasing and symbolism than the novel. Melodrama in a serious novel we are inclined to consider inexcusable but in a serious play a certain amount of it is absolutely necessary. "Hamlet"

without its melodrama is like flesh without its bones. Even Ibsen and Galsworthy use phrases and symbols so strong and highly colored that on the page they seem a little dubious; on the stage they are perfectly right. Anything less emphatic would be simply weak. The cunning Shaw loads his dice shamelessly with farce and melodrama in the service of Truth. Just as an actor's face seen without make-up in the blaze of light of a large theatre seems flat, pasty, without character, so stage dialogue, stage characterization, stage symbolism needs just that slight make-up of exaggerated intensity to carry it across the footlights.

That naïve critic who believes in absolute values is inclined to criticize Sheridan's comedy for being more emphatic than Jane Austen's, Galsworthy's plays as more "intended" than his novels. He calls it theatricalism, not knowing that theatricalism is merely the unescapable necessity of the theatre. Goethe's "Faust" *is* theatrical beside his "Wilhelm Meister." Sudermann's "Magda" *is* theatrical in comparison with his unemphatic "Dame Care," for these men were intelligent artists who knew how to fit method to material. Few novelists would dare invent the bold symbolism of the living woman with the dead soul that Andreyev uses in "Katerina." Werfel's

monster in "Goat Song" would wreck a novel like "Class Reunion." On the stage, however, it succeeds precisely because its sensational symbolism is necessary.

Do not be led astray by accidental associations. William Vaughan Moody's "The Great Divide" is a little simple and old-fashioned today in its technic, but it hardly deserves the criticism I have heard youngsters make, that it is only another "western." They have seen so many movies that a play with western local color merely brings Bill Hart to mind and so they miss that profoundly dramatic and philosophical core of the play, the conflict between the inhibitive puritanism of the east and the creative pragmatism of the west incarnated in hero and heroine. Another case of inability to dissociate ideas. It was Shakespeare's genius that he could take the primitive blood melodramas of his youth and sublimate them little by little into "Hamlet" and "Lear." Doubtless there were many who could see no difference between the old and the new, and as many who stubbornly preferred the old.

Dramatic Technic

There is no need in a book like this to say anything about "dramatic technic." It is enough to say this: a mere emotional enjoyment, however

pleasurable, cannot in the nature of things be as satisfactory as an enjoyment backed by knowledge. I, for instance, who do not go to football games very often and am near-sighted into the bargain, get little more out of a game than a general emotional kick at seeing so many men trying so determinedly to damage each other. My pleasure is elementary compared with that of an experienced football spectator who knows the rules and is accustomed to the game and can judge the value of details I am not even conscious of. On the other hand I am perfectly sure that I get much more specific pleasure out of an acted play than many people who simply see it in a welter of emotion, without knowing how the effects were produced or how to judge their validity. The person who tells you that he hates the idea of pulling a play to pieces, that it just spoils the pleasure for him, might just as well go to Coney Island. Even good vaudeville is beyond him intellectually. He remains the eternal child, and art to him is merely the eternal circus. He doesn't matter.

So if you are interested in the theatre and like to see and read plays, it would not be a bad idea to read a book or two on the technic of the drama, always remembering that a book on technic can at its best be only an analysis of what has been done, not a prescription of what should be done. The old

German Freytag is all right for ancient and Shakespearean and romantic drama but of little use for the modern. William Archer's "Play Making" is the most readable modern book but so widely allusive that one must know something about the drama he uses as background if one is to comprehend his points. George P. Baker's "Dramatic Technique," a book for use in classes, is more academic and less readable, but it is copiously illustrated with passages of sufficient length and is therefore more self contained. These books are now a little out of date in that they deal primarily with the well-made play and give little help on the drama of the past fifteen years, Expressionism, the Russian inventions, and Eugene O'Neill's astonishing experiments in form. Both are rather mechanical and rigid in their sense of the possibilities of dramatic form. They write *finis* just at the moment when drama is becoming fluid and creative again. For the one-act play the little book of Percival Wilde, himself a prolific manufacturer of tabloid drama, is probably the best.

These books will help you so long as you remember that their real job is to give you the consensus of opinion of practicing dramatists as to workable means in telling a story on the stage. When they become dogmatic, reach for the salt box. Remember the old saying that drama is

"some actors, four boards and a passion," and do not allow yourself to be pinned down to any less catholic definition. Nothing is less fruitful than to come away from a play that has obviously moved and held a large audience, chattering so much about exposition, motivation, and the essential scene as to forget the human values in the play, its intention and its truth. When Aristotle hazarded the opinion that the purpose of great drama was cathartic, to purge you of your own petty anxieties and selfishnesses in the recognition of how universal can be the working out of some great moral problem, he said something equally applicable to the "Antigone," "Hamlet," and "Ghosts" and "The Hairy Ape." You should receive tragedy as you receive the Eucharist, empty of self, reflective, and purposeful.

Drama for Adults

In the theatre especially, you need to be on your guard against a too easy satisfaction with the Pollyanna penny whistle. A play must attract crowds; if it does not attract crowds it is a failure. Most crowds are elementary. Charles Frohman once said that most plays were produced to suit the matinée taste of idle women. David Belasco once said that plays were written and produced to meet the emotional needs of young men and girls, aged twenty, in couples. If this is true, most plays

you see will be the elementary story play, that most primitive form of story telling, in which motivation of character and development and idea are intentionally subordinated to the exciting or amusing anecdote.

But the only play which can enrich your experience is that in which serious treatment of character is used to build, in Galsworthy's words, a spire of meaning. Characters properly motivated working out the solution of a problem "within the ring fence of an idea." This sounds serious yet the piece need not be dreary. This describes the material and the method of high comedy and comedy of manners, just as well as that of tragedy and that less exalted form for which we have no word in English except "drama." The spire of meaning may be individual, social, or philosophical. In finer art it will be implicit, in less fine art explicit, but none the less useful to you.

No one has phrased this purpose and necessity of modern drama written for intelligent people better than John Galsworthy in his essay called "Some Platitudes Concerning Drama" originally printed in "The Inn of Tranquillity," but also to be found in that highly stimulating and interesting volume "A Little Book of Modern Criticism" published in the Modern Library. This essay above all others I urge upon you.

CHAPTER XIII

Poetry

ONE of the chief reasons for confusion in any discussion about Poetry, is that the word may mean any one of three things. It may mean poetry as opposed to criticism; it may mean poetry as opposed to prose; it may mean poetry as opposed to verse.

The first I have already dealt with in Chapter VI. Criticism is the result of the mind working methodically to bring order out of chaos. It is or should be largely objective. It is theology, philosophy, science, sociology. Poetry is the result of the imagination at work day-dreaming, making something out of nothing, spinning out its fancies like a spider her thread, making pictures, telling stories. It must in its nature be primarily subjective. All novels, short stories and plays, as well as lyrics and songs, are poetry. History is perhaps the no-man's land between the two, for in great history the objective critic and the subjective poet are almost equally balanced. The Ph.D. thesis in history, the mess of amassed facts carefully free from poetic interpretation, is not literature at all

and need not be considered; it is merely raw material for a historian. In Herodotus the poet, and in Thucydides the critic, is dominant. In Gibbon we feel a sceptical poet and in Macaulay a partisan poet suffusing the material. In the field of philosophy the same problem exists. The system-makers are primarily critics, Aristotle and Aquinas and Kant, but Plato is indisputably a poet philosophizing in parables, and Nietzsche a philosopher whose method is almost lost in dithyramb.

Roughly it may be said that no criticism which has not a strong infusion of poetry lasts as literature, *i.e.*, is read for its own sake. Humanity seems to feel the need of the dream and the wish and the picture to give warmth and hope to the cold conclusions of the mind. All that men have loved best in literature has in it the stuff of poetry.

Emotion and Rhythm

About poetry in relation to prose we are, I think, a little more intelligent than we were fifty years ago. We have come to recognize that everything in rime and meter is not poetry and that all poetry is not in rime and meter. We must go far behind both to state the problem.

Havelock Ellis in the preface to "The Dance of Life" hypothetizes that all the plastic arts arose

from the primitive shelter hut and all imaginative literature, epic, drama, and lyric, as well as music, arose from the dance. The natural and instinctive expression of emotion is rhythmic bodily movement. "Rhythm" means a repetitive pattern of movement or sound more or less tending towards regularity though not always reaching it. It is not necessarily a mathematical regularity, as "meter" is. The metronome ticking on the top of the piano enforces an absolute regularity which only a novice obeys in his playing. The adept, the artist, varies the meter while preserving the looser but still emotional rhythm.

This *tempo rubato,* Chopin's device and Gershwin's, is also the essential secret of what we call "free verse." The spontaneous capering of a child, the college yell, and the snake dance are highly rhythmic expressions of emotion, though not always metric. Waves crashing on the beach *seem* to us so rhythmic that we postulate an imaginary "ninth wave" to lend nature a regularity it does not really possess.

Rhythmic bodily movement accompanied perhaps by drum or flute, calls for more specific expression. That queer animal, the artist, his body tingling strangely to the rhythm, expresses it, willy-nilly, in words which the crowd takes up. So is born the hunting or battle song, the lament,

the magic corn song, the hymn. (I have never been able to bring myself to believe in art as spontaneous combustion, the work of the crowd. Always there is the artist.) And by a long slow process of preserving, of building up and stitching together, comes the ballad, the epic, the drama, all of them developments from the first subjective lyric, the song.

Rhythm in Prose

The words in which we transact and record the ordinary business of life are not the seed of emotion, therefore not rhythmic. (The laws, however, mysterious pronouncements of the gods through oracles, are for a long time poetry, until man sees that he may just as well manufacture laws for himself, and they sink to prose.) As law and history and even story telling and drama become less and less the expression of emotion and more and more the expression of objective intelligence, less and less is the emotional dancing rhythm felt. More and more the cadences become loose, irregular, straightforward rather than repetitive, self conscious and cerebral. Henceforth prose, the comparatively unrhythmic, is the expression of the idea, and poetry, the comparatively rhythmic, is the expression of the emotion.

One can trace the growth of emotion in prose by

the ascending rhythm. Even an impassioned letter, read in cold blood, is more rhythmic than a business letter. There was a time when increased rhythm in prose was looked upon as "sublime." Eighteenth century oratory, for instance, and the more sentimental passages of Charles Dickens, the blank verse of the death of Little Nell. Today, with a more austere taste, we reject such naïve rhythms as bad prose and seek, instead, for a pattern so delicately and unobtrusively rhythmic that Sir Thomas Browne or Samuel Johnson would not have recognized it at all. Yet no prose is great without rhythm, that is repetitive pattern. Lincoln's Gettysburg Speech is great for its patterns more than for its substance, and the pragmatic materialism of our day reveals itself in newspaper style, political oratory, business correspondence, and popular fiction, in which it is hardly possible to detect any traces of that unemphatic but intentional pattern that marks good prose.

This brings us to the root of the matter. *The popular conception of the difference between poetry and prose is only imaginary.* The appearance on the page does not matter. It is the emotional effect of the sound which counts. Much of what is printed in the King James Bible as prose is not merely cadenced, as Richard Green Moulton in

"The Modern Reader's Bible" has overwhelmingly proved, but it is highly rhythmic, repetitive, and patterned. No one with any ear has any excuse for lumping the Book of Kings and the Book of Isaiah together as prose. And much of eighteenth century poetry we now call "prosaic," that is, an intellectual expression of ideas, which happens to be strictly metrical in form.

Simple Meter and Complex Rhythm

No one today is such a fool as to compare Walt Whitman with Martin Tupper, that prosy proverb-monger, simply because superficially their pages "look alike." Of course, all inspiration flies on unequal wings and there are pages of Walt Whitman, some of his long catalogues perhaps, which are as prosy as "The Psalm of Life." But turn to "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and the hymn to Death in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed," and you will find an emotional and imaginative intensity so great that its rhythm swings, not perhaps by the line but certainly by the paragraph, as surely even if not so obviously as that of the great Hebrew poets.

Meter is simply an early convenience of the improvisers, furnishing the strongly marked mathematical cadence which is the easiest and most elementary stimulus to the hearer. But rime is a

late-born and illegitimate child of poetry. The ancients knew it not or despised it. Only when Latin went to the dogs and became dog Latin did the mediæval Christian poets use rime to bolster up and make emphatic lines that had lost the suave quantities of the classic poets and must, perforce, rely on sharp metrical accent and sharp end rimes, both the devices of elementary poets composing for elementary hearers.

One progresses in poetry from the elementary to the complex. The boy who prefers the blatant and vulgar rime and meter of the imitator Robert Service to that of his master Kipling does so because his ear can distinguish only the crudest and most obvious accents. Likewise the college man who will read only the heavily accented Kipling, powerful and imaginative as he is, but balks at Masefield. The popularity of Robert Frost and Vachel Lindsay can to a certain extent be traced to the simplicity and obviousness of their verse patterns, as compared to the complexity and subtlety of Sandburg's and Amy Lowell's. Many people never cultivate an ear capable of hearing Whitman or Browning. The analogy here to that of popular appreciation of music is, of course, exact. From Nevin and Gounod through McDowell and Debussy to Scriabin and Respighi, is a fair parallel. In jazz the jump from Irving Berlin to

Gershwin's "An American in Paris" is hardly less great. But one can train the ear if one will.

Popular Verse

Rime and meter, then, do not make poetry, nor does the lack of them unmake it. This brings us to the third distinction, the difference between poetry and "verse." This should be the simplest in theory although it is certainly the most bothersome in practice. For here it is dogmatism against dogmatism.

A recent newspaper syndicate questionnaire to determine the most popular poems among our people reported that "The Psalm of Life" by Longfellow led all the rest. This was to be expected. The second choice was "The House By the Side of the Road" by Sam Walter Foss. Now these are not poetry; they are deservedly popular verse. I do not suppose I shall succeed in making the distinction clear but I can try.

I am not objecting to Longfellow or Foss, but both have written far finer poetry than these examples, and far less known. I am not objecting to their philosophies, which are admirable, but to their expression of them, which is elementary. Both are merely proverbs in verse simple enough to be learned by very young children. That is the real reason why "The Psalm of Life" led all the

rest. There is no American but has learned it in primary school. But Emerson's fine "Daughters of Time, the Hypocritic Days," though surely as universal in its theme, and even as genuinely simple in the good sense, was not, however, phrased for children. Most of us grew up without knowing it.

The test case is Mr. Edgar Guest. He is enormously read by people who will not attempt poetry, because he is easy, fluent, colloquial, simple in theme and phrase, emotional and idealistic, and he appeals to the heart. But these things, in spite of a widespread belief to the contrary, are not criteria of poetry.

Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" deals with the universal emotion of love, but it is not great poetry for that reason. The poetry is great because the expression is great. Wordsworth expressed greatly in a sonnet the universal ideas of duty and discipline. Southey expressed much the same idea in a poem, "Father William," so elementary and ordinary, so like an Edgar Guest poem, that Lewis Carroll was irresistibly impelled to his brilliant parody. In "Ichabod" Whittier expressed a local subject in great phrasing; in "Maud Muller" he expressed a subject far more universal and human in a manner so feeble and banal that it has been a laughing stock ever since.

Most folk would admit that the words of our popular sentimental songs are not poetry, but on examination they will be found to be no more ordinary than much of our highly esteemed popular verse, such verse as is found in Joe Mitchell Chapple's amazing anthology "Heart Throbs."

The poet and the verse-maker will take the same subject, but only the poet will make poetry of it. Riley's "When the frost is on the punkin" and Frost's "Gathering Apples" are not unlike in subject matter, but while the one remains forever elementary dialect verse the other is poetry. The one writer took the easy commonplace way of phrasing, the other strove for a phrasing so restrained, so individual, so suggestive and so intended that one at once recognizes a piece of craftsmanship as superior to that of Riley as fine handicraft is superior to competent machinecraft.

The Poet and Not the Material

"Believe me if all those endearing young charms," for all its manner, has a quality that "Silver threads among the gold" never reaches; its quality is largely its manner. Compare that poem of Emerson's which begins "Announced by all the trumpets of the sky" with that of Lowell's which begins "The snow had begun in the gloam-

ing," and see if you can catch that difference in rightness of phrasing which makes the one poetry and the other, with its sentimental tag, only verse. It is not the sentiment which is in question but its banal phrasing that makes the great fact of death seem somehow dragged in for emotional effect. Read the list of Arnold's touchstones of poetry in his famous essay. Compare those phrasings with that of any one of Guest's or Foss's or Ella Wheeler Wilcox's verses, and see if you begin to guess at the secret.

Heart appeal does not make poetry. Great truths do not make poetry. Optimism and idealism do not make poetry. Simple and universal emotions do not make poetry. These are, all, only the raw materials. Poetry is poetic expression. For this reason most of the material one finds reprinted by request in the poetry columns of our newspapers must be called verse. There is the verse of proverbial advice and homely philosophy, like that of Riley and Foss; there is the verse of a rather commonplace and threadbare idealism like that of Edgar Guest; there is domestic and sentimental verse, the unimaginative treatment of really profound subjects; and there is the conventional rhetorical treatment of passion and death. Both sentiment and style are stereotypes so

worn that the lines are blurred. Once the common coin of poetry but now so thin and defaced that its value is gone. Poetry is the fresh mintage of the imagination, the fresh vision that clothes itself in fresh words.

The Lowest Common Denominator

Yet this easy, pedestrian, familiar and unimaginative phrasing of mass-emotion, the habitual responses of undifferentiated human beings, is all that most people will accept as poetry. The response of that rare spirit the true poet, the highly differentiated and aware person who seeks to phrase a fresh and personal vision in the only language that incarnates it—this they shrug at, call "deep," and turn back to their familiar shallows. Incidentally, whenever you find a reader, boy or girl or adult, habitually dismissing everything except the most elementary examples of literature as "deep" or "flowery"—those two stupid stereotypes—there you have a person either congenitally incapable of dealing with them, or, more tragic, a person so badly trained and so lazy as to be unwilling to make the effort.

It is the business of those who believe in literature and art as civilizing agents to stop teaching

the Lowest Common Denominator and to teach, instead, the Highest Common Factor.

Where Angels Fear to Tread

These three, then, are not poetry: criticism, prose, and verse. But, you will say, I have not yet told you what poetry *is*. Aye, there's the rub!

I suppose the best known definition is that of Poe whom Emerson cruelly called "the jingle man." Poe defined poetry "as the rhythmical creation of beauty." His own conception of the rhythmical creation of beauty was "The Bells" and "Annabel Lee." We shall have to do better than that. One can accept it as a just, though incomplete statement, provided one stretches the word rhythm to include such hermaphrodites as Amy Lowell's polyphonic prose, those chunks of print crammed with subtle interweavings of rime and assonance. And provided one stretches the word "beauty" far beyond the nineteenth century limitations of romantic beauty, provided one remembers what the Orientals have called beauty, and the Slavs, and the Augustans, and those ancient Greeks who knew that Medusa's beauty was also a horror.

Certain things we do know. Poetry is emotional rather than critical, therefore it is rhythmic. It is

persuasive rather than argumentative; its appeal is to the imagination, not to the mind. Therefore, the symbols it uses are concrete picture symbols rather than abstractions. When Burns wishes to speak of his love he can think of nothing more universal and persuasive and direct than to say that she is "like a red, red rose that's newly sprung in June"; and when Dante wishes to express the great mystery of his vision of the Mother of God surrounded by saints and all the hosts of heaven, he falls back on the same symbol, the flaming rose of which the petals are the hierarchy and Our Lady its golden heart.

And to wing its rhythm and point its picture-making Poetry has as its chief resource the exact and poetic word, the intense, individual phrase, fresh-minted in the imagination. Prose proliferates, poetry selects. Prose is a stout nourishing brew but poetry is a distillation and an essence. Prose is the "light of common day," poetry sees by flashes of the imagination. The right and perfect word which expresses the glimpse of Truth that a single eager and sensitive individual has caught, suggested by picture symbols, so rhythmically phrased as to rouse emotion in the reader—that, I take it, is poetry.

It may be the personal lyric, the cry of the

heart, it may be descriptive, it may be narrative or drama, it may be philosophical, but all these must be *phrased,* or they are not poetry. But objective definition is not enough. Let me quote another. The only American woman poet worthy to rank with Emerson, herself a unique if there ever were one, said this:

"If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know it it poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know this is poetry. These are the only ways I know it."

Most of us are not so thin-skinned and sensitive as Emily Dickinson was—which is only to say that we are not poets—but even in our thick-skinned and unaware fashion we can, I think, feel the rightness of this as indirect definition.

Warning and Example

This does not mean that the poet himself must feel like that. The poet's eye in fine frenzy rolling is, I am afraid, a romantic myth applicable only to bad poets. The "cold eye of the poet" is a more intuitive phrase. It is the business of the poet not to let his emotions tear him but to keep them in strict control, to ride in the whirlwind and direct the storm, so that his mind may shape what his

imagination sees. If you have ever seen a reproduction of one of Keats's manuscripts, you will have noticed those little pyramids of crossed-out words above some of the most famous lines in English poetry. John Keats, who felt so intensely the quality of life, was determined that through no leakage of words should he fail to make that quality everlasting for the sympathetic reader. The greater his control the greater his poetry. The eighteenth century convention of the distracted poet was the convention of an age that distrusted poetry and botched it. The great poets are masters of themselves as they are of the language. If Shakespeare ever held horses, says Chesterton, it was no doubt because he was by far the fittest person to hold them.

I hesitate to quote because quotation gives me away. But let me end this chapter with a bit of verse and a bit of poetry. The one is the only fragment I remember of Foss's well beloved verse.

> Let others sit in the scorner's seat
> And hurl the cynic's ban,
> Let *me* live in a house by the side of the road
> And be a friend to man!

Sound, altruistic, Christian principles in pleasantly easy verse—but not poetry!

Against it let me set these, which time shall never efface from my memory, by Elinor Wylie, who died young and a genius.

Avoid the reeking herd,
Shun the polluted flock,
Live like that stoic bird,
The eagle of the rock.

The huddled warmth of crowds
Begets and fosters hate;
He keeps, above the clouds,
His cliff inviolate.

When flocks are folded warm
And herds to shelter run,
He sails above the storm,
He stares into the sun.

If in the eagle's track
Your sinews cannot leap,
Avoid the lathered pack,
Turn from the steaming sheep.

If you would keep your soul
From spotted sight or sound,
Live like the velvet mole;
Go burrow underground.

And there hold intercourse
With roots of trees and stones,
With rivers at their source,
And disembodied bones.

This, "The Eagle and the Mole" from "Nets to Catch the Wind,"* seems to me not only a fine example of the necessary qualities of poetry, of which I have been talking,—emotion, rhythm, intellectual control, picture-making and the intense and exact phrase—but it seems to me also a thoroughly adequate description of the Poet, the real poet as distinguished from the maker of popular verses.

*By permission of the publishers, Harcourt, Brace, Co.

CHAPTER XIV

The Essay, Biography and Such

A FEW years ago a well-known magazine of the more thoughtful kind asked me to serve as judge in an essay contest. There were to be one class for high school students and one for college students. There was a large number of manuscripts to read, enough to give one a fair sense of what high school and college writing was like. As a result I achieved one profound conviction; that our high schools, and to a less extent our colleges, are overwhelmingly preoccupied with one type of essay, the familiar, to the exclusion of other far more important kinds.

Essay after essay was modelled after those published in a department of amateur essays conducted by the magazine in question. Now this magazine is widely used in high school and college English departments and I have no doubt that its influence is great. If the essays I read are any criteria of what is being taught, I am inclined to think its influence is bad. For most of them were the slenderest of attempts at the "familiar." Essays on Being Plain, on Haircuts, on House-

cleaning, on Cafeterias, on Old Fords, all written in that chatty, persuasive, mildly egoistic, mildly humorous, mildly reflective style, which is the hallmark of the modern familiar essay. Over them all was the stamp of the pleasant, cultivated right-thinking lady who teaches English to our adolescents and is so interested in her pupils' personalities that I am afraid she sometimes neglects their minds. Or of the pleasant, cultivated, somewhat mild gentleman with a taste for letters, who performs the same office for our college freshmen.

Collections of Essays

I had the curiosity to turn from the results to the sources, to some of the more successful collections of classic and semi-classic essays used in our schools. I found there the same heavy proportion of the familiar essay. A little Bacon and Montaigne (for the look of the thing), a great deal of Addison and Steele, much of Charles Lamb, the more threadbare and obvious of Emerson's revamped lectures, Thoreau, of course, and Stevenson; of the moderns, people like Samuel Crothers, Agnes Repplier, E. V. Lucas and Christopher Morley. But of Macaulay, Arnold, Ruskin, Huxley, Tyndall, Newman, Pater, the great nineteenth

century serious essayists, hardly a trace. Nothing of course from any "foreign" literature.

In the past few years this situation has been remedied to a great extent by many collections of modern essays made by teachers who want ideas instead of amusing personalities. It is possible to find collections containing the work not only of the great dead but of the serious living; William James, Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Mrs. Gerould, L. P. Jack, Santayana, as well as the better known Wells, Galsworthy and Chesterton. I imagine that these are making great headway in our better schools and colleges. If I am correct, future essay contests will show the results, and all for the better. But for the present I am afraid that the average student is steeped in the chatty and familiar folk who say little charmingly, with the result that when he comes to write out of his own petty experience he can give us only a dilution of Lamb or of Morley. There is even a book "The Writing of Informal Essays" by the Misses Chase and MacGregor (Henry Holt and Co.), which from its title apparently attempts to teach the art of being a Lucas or a Thoreau, highly reflective, egocentric and unique.

When, therefore, you run college students up against that kind of essay which is of most value to them at that age, the soberly written, closely

reasoned, unified statement of a single serious proposition, you will find that they cannot chew it. Their teeth have grown soft on the classic literary cereals and the *ersatz* foods of the lesser, imitative moderns. Such a great collection as Steeves and Ristine's "Essays in Contemporary Thought," which, except for the fact that it needs weeding out a little and being brought more up to date, is the best I have found, is invaluable for toughening the intellectual teeth.

There is danger in using exclusively even the best of the moderns. They are increasingly individualistic and experimental. They are increasingly journalistic; that is; their essays seem written more for the magazine and the book, inclined to be brief, colloquial and sketchy. And one cannot understand how original and experimental they are without a sound background of the nineteenth century essay. There was the great age!

There Were Giants Then

Out of the nineteenth century essay alone one can get a sound background of knowledge of the great problems which still perplex us. All later contributions must take these for granted. The great controversy between Arnold and Huxley on what constitutes the education of a cultivated man, Ruskin on industrialism and civilization,

Carlyle on utilitarianism and religion, Mill on liberty and the subjection of women, Arnold on Hellenism and Hebraism, Huxley's great apologias for Darwinism, the Belfast Address of Tyndall, Newman on the making of a university, Pater on æsthetic, these—even without the European contributions—will set a man's feet squarely in the path that leads to the understanding of the major puzzles of today.

These men dealt with universals where the men of today deal with particulars. They handled theirs with assurance where today we handle ours with uncertainty. Much of their assurance has been shaken by later fact and opinion, but though much is taken much abides. They laid down great propositions and argued them in the grand manner. They took room to turn round in; they looked to their architectonics; they cleaned up a subject. Even today their texts must remain the points of departure of those who differ with them.

The best of their successors took their method and humanized it. There is without question something a little austere and objective about Mill and Arnold and Pater. They wrote for gentlemen and scholars. As the century waxed and waned and the public school system grew, it became necessary to say great things in a somewhat more easy and approachable style. The earlier of Wells's

surveys of his civilization, such books as "Anticipations" and "Mankind in the Making," Chesterton's "Orthodoxy" and "What's Wrong With the World," William James's scattered papers and his "Pragmatism," and, nowadays, the work of L. P. Jack, G. Lowes Dickinson, Bertrand Russell, Henry Canby, and John Dewey carry on this great tradition of humanizing knowledge without ever debasing it to the newspaper level of much of the writing of the day. In their light the hordes of recent critics, particularly the critics of literature, seem a little too easy and obvious.

The average history of literature, lavishing space on the great, and even the lesser, poets and novelists, is inclined to neglect these others. Yet these are the intellectual skeleton for the imaginative flesh of the romancers. Without them the world of the imaginative writer is a jelly. One cannot understand George Eliot without knowing something about Positivism, or Kingsley without Utilitarianism, or Tennyson without Palmerston and Herbert Spencer. Literary history must give a picture of the world in which the art of any generation functions, and that means more intense attention to the thought-makers, the serious essayists than the average history of literature ever gives.

Historians and Poets

The same propositions are generally true of history and biography. History has come increasingly to be the making of monographs, such works as James Truslow Adams's admirable study of Colonial New England or that other fine account, the name of the author of which I am ashamed to say I cannot call to mind, in "The Frontier in American History." The outcry by the professional historians against Wells's "Outline" was caused quite as much, I incline to believe, by the fact that the old "universal" history is definitely out of style as by the fact that that particular work was so completely suffused (necessarily and rightly) with Wells's philosophy of society. The same criticism was made of Charles and Mary Beard's attempt to pack the history of our American Civilization into two volumes. Yet it is clear, I think, that we need more universals, more large interpretations, as the pile of well-written specific monographs mounts ever higher.

There again we must turn back to the classic historians. Much of their authority is severely shaken by later research, none of which might have been done save for their great pioneering, but even today the interpretation of a Gibbon, a Bancroft, a Mommsen must be taken into account.

For the average reader, for whom the large outline is sufficient, nothing can replace these. How many of us got from Wells our first lively impression that the history of Asia was as closely packed and almost as important (even for us westerners) as the familiar routine of "Europe, mediæval and modern." And, to climb to higher levels, was it not the sudden perception of the reality of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," as it came to young Henry Adams just out of college, that determined his whole philosophical life.

Is there yet anything to replace Green's "Short History of the English People" or Parkman's story of the French and Indian wars? Not for the historian, I mean, or for the specialist, but for the average reader. Is there anything, even, to replace Macaulay's history of the twilight of the Stuarts and the rise of parliamentary government? Bigoted Whig as he was, confirmed Utilitarian, is there anybody who has told the story better? I ask, because I do not pretend to be an authority on these points. But I think not. Turn a young person loose in Macaulay's essays, literary, historical and biographical and he will have a background which, for richness, for color, for vivid life in action, can hardly be matched. Later he can correct the bias but he will never lose the sense that these people lived!

Literature needs a frame and no frame can match that made by an historian who is also a poet. The cool sceptical Gibbon, the headlong Macaulay, the romantic Prescott, the laborious Parkman, these were in their way poets, as Wells is in his and the Italian Ferrero. For the average reader I will match them against all the palimpsest grubbers in all the archives of all the universities. When the Ph.D. has found his facts, he has only to wait modestly for the poet to interpret them. What the fact was hardly matters. What the dynamic interpretation of the fact means to the future matters a great deal. When better histories are written, poets will write them.

Biographers on the Loose

In the field of biography the situation is reversed. In history the graduate students pre-empt the field, run the works. In biography the poets have the reins on their necks and are running hell-for-leather. They need the check just as the historians need the spur. "Nothing too much" still remains a good motto in literature.

The present fashion is of course a violent swing of the pendulum away from the typical late nineteenth century biography. A distinguished if not eminent biologist now dead used to express the hope that "they wouldn't try to make a two vol-

ume man out of him." By this he meant, of course, the usual formal biography, padded out with genealogies, letters, public addresses and bibliographies, voluminous about the least of public acts, reticent to the point of secretiveness about personal life and traits, a stuffed figure not a human being, reminding one of our memorial statues of public men of the post-Rebellion period, rigid figures in cast iron frock-coats and pants (there is no other word for them),—biographies as much like literature as these others were like sculpture.

What lay behind the late Victorian biography? Many English traits, imitated by our own dutiful men of letters. The habit of keeping one's self to one's self; the habit of reticence and decent reservations, the naïve belief that where there was no smoke no one would be justified in suspecting fire; the belief in euphemisms and making the best of it; the belief that the most important thing in life was to dodge Mrs. Grundy; the tastes that emasculated the dictionaries, set wives to calling their husbands mister, forbade mixed bathing and invented bathing machines—all these found their counterpart in the late Victorian biography. It was a standard of the permissible at which the preceding century, with its own fine decorum, would have laughed. That century produced Johnson's "Savage" and Boswell's "Johnson" and

Macaulay's "Boswell." The scandal roused by Mrs. Stowe's defence of Lady Byron and Froude's "Carlyle" and the publication of the Barrett-Browning letters marks the swing of the pendulum. Gladstone abandoned Parnell, for a public man must have no private life.

The Method of Strachey

The later scandal that marked Lytton Strachey's earlier "Florence Nightingale" and later "Queen Victoria" marks the swing back, not to Boswell but to Boswell as material for fine art. Strachey may be taken as the man who turned the corner, the bell-wether of the herd, although we in America may claim that Gamaliel Bradford was using the same method in his psychographs, "Damaged Souls" and other biographical chapters, before we had heard of Strachey. Nevertheless we took our fashion, as usual, from the Englishman.

What Bradford and Strachey did was simply to apply Galsworthy's formula for good drama to biography. A life seen in illustrative scenes, like a play.* Character above all, plot and dialogue simply illustrations of character, character working out its destiny "within the ring fence of an idea," character "with a spire of meaning," every-

*See the play "Queen Victoria" made from Strachey's book by Walter Pritchard Eaton and David Carb.

thing in a man's or woman's life selected, edited, arranged, emphasized, balanced, interpreted to make a portrait not a photograph. Biography becomes once more an art, that is, an arrangement of life.

The excellences of the method are unmistakable. It made biography readable again. It gave us many a noteworthy modern study. Strachey's "Elizabeth and Essex," Bradford's "Darwin," Lewis's "François Villon," Hackett's "Henry the Eighth," Peterson's "Havelock Ellis," Mumford's "Herman Melville," to name only a few of a long and distinguished recent list. But the method also had its dangers.

It allowed too much leeway for the injudicious to select what he wished, thereby suppressing what he wished, and to interpret it as he pleased. The method apparently grew on Strachey himself so much as to make his "Elizabeth and Essex" a kind of study in romantic tragedy and thereby lay it open to criticism even more severe than that of his "Queen Victoria." Maurois's "Shelley' swung so far toward biographical fiction as to be dubious, however charming. The "Disræli" was far safer. Rogers's "Walt Whitman" was also frankly fictional in its invention of corroborative detail. From that it was only a step to Elinor Wylie's "The Orphan Angel," that gorgeous story of

what might have happened to Shelley if only he had not been drowned.

This sense that the biographer must be left free to be a creative artist is dominant in the past decade. In Strachey, cool and impersonal, it is implicit; in Maurois's new book "Aspects of Biography" (D. Appleton and Co.) it is advanced dogmatically that the biography is not merely a work of specific art, as opposed to scientific generalization, but that its writing must be a work of deliverance and escape for the poet who writes it. Emil Ludwig, whose "Napoleon" and "Bismarck" have been much tasted, says in his preface to "Genius and Character" that he has reverted to the method of Plutarch. Instead of patiently adding together this trait and that to this and that circumstance and letting the sum stand for the whole, it is the business of the biographer, he says, to determine what is the main characteristic of the subject, to determine, so to speak, in what key the portrait shall be painted, and then to select his colors and draw his outline to bring out this predetermined aspect. One must grant that the "Napoleon" is successful, but the method in the hands of the unskillful or the unscrupulous will bear watching.

Psychoanalysts and Romancers

Another angle of the whole business, one for

which it is only just to say that Strachey was not responsible, is the increasing number of attempts to interpret the dead in the light of the specific hypotheses of Dr. Sigmund Freud. This psychoanalyzing was superbly done by such a temperate and intelligent critic as Van Wyck Brooks in "The Ordeal of Mark Twain" and "The Pilgrimage of Henry James." But in the hands of the late Paxton Hibben, what was apparently a strong and preconceived dislike of Henry Ward Beecher allowed him to use the method to ruthless and unfair advantage. Nevertheless, the method is too valuable to be ruled out *en bloc,* particularly in the attempt to interpret men of letters, for if the conclusions of Freud are valid anywhere they seem particularly competent to explain that irritable nervous organism, the artist. But examples of this method need to be scrutinized more carefully than those less liable to perversion.

Curiously, as the biographer has grown to be more like fiction, the historical novel has grown to be more like history. Old fashioned historical romance is in the discard. Sabatini and the other story tellers in what might be called the Scott-Dumas-Stevenson-Stanley Weyman succession are out of fashion compared to the author of "Drums" and "Marching Men" in this country and

"Jew Süss" and "The Ugly Duchess" abroad. The naïve story in which the girl heroine walks out of the front gate and runs smack into George Washington, Lord Cornwallis, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, George III, and John Paul Jones, in an entanglement that ends only with Yorktown, no longer appears to us reasonable. The new historical novel pictures an epoch, in which certain individuals happen to be, without sacrificing probabilities, involved. But the emphasis is not on the individual but on the crowd. So little does the individual matter that in the newest novel of the sort, "The Wave," by Evelyn Scott, there is no continuity of individual story, only a series of cineomatographic "flashes," as in Hardy's "The Dynasts."

Ecce Homo!

But for history and biography alike, and their derivatives, the most heartening thing in the whole modern swing is the sense of the unique value of the individual, that history is not merely a play of economic and political forces, not merely the public acts of important people on dress parade, but that in unpacking the heart of this and that one's mystery one may be in fact helping unpack the mystery of an age. For man is at once product and creator of his time.

CHAPTER XV

Philosophy and Science

PHILOSOPHY is the child of religion and the mother of science. As soon as man begins to be weary of and to see through the legends which explain our universe in terms of the whims of beings not unlike ourselves, the anthropomorphic gods or god, the Olympians or the Yahweh of Genesis, as soon as man begins to speculate on his own hook as to the why of things, philosophy is born. At first it occupies itself with both the physical world—natural philosophy—and with the world of ideas—moral philosophy. Natural philosophy we call today physical science, and moral philosophy becomes the study of the imponderables, spirit and matter, the nature of God and man, life, death and immortality, teleology or the aim of things, the nature of mind itself—in a word, what today we call philosophy.

Philosophy is a clash of temperaments. We think spontaneously as we wish to think, and then, unconsciously, we bolster up our self-respect as so-called reasonable beings by inventing logical arguments to support our wishes. Hence every

man is at bottom naturally idealist or materialist, and out of that natural bias has grown a formidable literature of hypothesis and argument. History so-called is only the surface movement of the deeper currents we call philosophies. Every institution is the lengthened shadow not so much of a man as an idea. In the beginning is the Word—the idea—and the Word makes history. The basis of all culture, then, is a knowledge of what man has thought, and the results of that thought, in this most tiny slice of recent time, recorded human civilization. To give you a sense of what man's thinking is like you should read, first of all, that stimulating book "The Mind in the Making" by James Harvey Robinson. Like no other book this will help you to discount your deepest prejudices and to evaluate your own thinking.

The Easiest Way

Let us assume that you are not familiar with the field of thought in science and philosophy, but would like to know enough about it to understand the flood of contemporary allusions. You have not perhaps the education, or even that kind of mind, which enables you to deal easily with technical works, systematic philosophy or science. There is no use telling you to read Descartes or Kant or Poincaré, or Karl Pearson's "The Grammar of

Science." (I can't read them myself!) You will perhaps never be able, as I am not, to think exactly in terms of metaphysics and epistemology or even the simplest propositions of mathematics and physics. Nevertheless, there is no reason why you should not attain the basic points of view in both philosophy and science which will help you to understand the notions now current.

Second, I should read one of the simplest and most charming books ever written, "A Modern Symposium" by G. Lowes Dickinson,* in which some dozen or more types of human temperament tell why they think as they do. The reactionary, conservative, liberal, socialist and anarchist in politics; the critical, Arnold-like mind and the biological scientist; the idealist poet and the nihilist; the religious man, in this case a Quaker; the Nietzschean aristocrat, and the final philosopher who attempts a synthesis.

The value of the book is that it shows you incarnated the temperaments that shape the world's thought: he who sets up an ideal and would shape men's actions to conform to it; and he who thinks only in terms of experience, who experiments, goes by trial and error, and distrusts untried theories however noble; he who believes you can

*I am sorry to say that for most of the books mentioned in this chapter I cannot remember the publisher. All the books, however, are well known.

trust the mind; he who distrusts the mind and relies on intuition, plays a psychic hunch, believing that only so is he tuned in to the Mind of the universe; and he who distrusts reason and intuition because he sees life as a sum of mechanical forces working without intelligence and without meaning, and knows that he, too, is only a blind force at the mercy of greater forces; he who believes that matter is only a form of mind and he who believes that mind is only a form of matter; he who believes that the essential thing is not Mind but Will;—these are our philosophers.

After you have read G. Lowes Dickinson you will want to read a handbook of the history of philosophy in not too technical terms. The most famous in our day is that by Will Durant called "The Story of Philosophy." It is not ideal, but it is human and easy to read. Its great fault is the total omission of orthodox Catholic philosophy, the picture drawn by St. Thomas Aquinas of our universe on the basis of Catholic authority. But there is another book which begins with St. Thomas and Dante and brings the story down to our world of today, in far more detail and with far greater solidity than Mr. Durant's book. It is "The Making of the Modern Mind" by John Hermann Randall, Jr., of Columbia. It is not so easy reading as Durant's, it is closely written and

demands close attention, but one cannot afford to be without it.

These three works will give you your foundation. You will have some knowledge of the history of thinking as well as of the history of thought. Then you will want to look at some of the specific examples of the world's thinking.

The Greeks and Plato

The most useful books on classic Greek thought are G. Lowes Dickinson's "The Greek View of Life" (now published, I believe, in the same volume as "A Modern Symposium") and Gilbert Murray's "Greek Literature" and his "Five Stages of Greek Religion" (a new issue of his earlier "Four Stages"). Zimmern's "Greek State" is also notable. These will give you all you need to know here.

It was the glory of Socrates that he first saw the need of definition in philosophy and gave his life not to speculations upon physical phenomena but to the definition of necessary human conceptions. What is Justice? what is Virtue? what is Piety? these are the questions he asked. Struck by the gulf between these perfect conceptions and men's puzzlement of mind about them, and the resulting imperfections of our human institutions, the disciple of Socrates, Plato, wrought out his

notion of the Ideal, the single most dynamic and long-lived concept in philosophy, which, incorporated into Christianity, survived the dark ages. It is the notion that all our physical world, all our human life and thought, are only appearances, imitations of the true world that exists in the Mind of the Universe, in God. Man, unenlightened, is lost in the mazes of opinion that has no reality. Only the philosopher through devoted study learns to distinguish between appearance and reality, between opinion and truth, hence the need for a state ruled by philosopher-kings. Or, as the church put it, the necessity for having the spiritual arm superior to the secular arm.

You will want, therefore, to read the most famous of the Socratic dialogues. There is a handy volume in one of the Macmillan series called, I think, "The Trial and Death of Socrates," containing the Euthyphron, the Apology, the Crito, and the Phaedo—all you need. This with "The Republic," the first and most famous of Utopias, will give you a footing.

Materialist and Stoic

But a contemporary of Socrates and Plato was preaching the doctrine that there is no mind in the universe, that nothing exists but atoms and empty space, of which all matter and life and

thought are allotropic forms. The history of this astounding guess of Democritus, which leads us straight to modern physical chemistry and biochemistry, is best found briefly in Tyndall's famous "Belfast Address" delivered half a century ago, supplemented by the latest word on the subject, the popularly written but still difficult "The Nature of the Physical World" published this year by Professor Eddington.

The application of this atomic hypothesis to human life resulted in Epicureanism, the doctrines of which eliminated the gods and the hereafter, abolished the fear of death, and taught that man's highest good was to enjoy life while he had it. Lucretius turned this belief into poetry, "De Rerum Natura" ("Concerning the Nature of Things") best read in Munro's prose translation. The Odes of Horace are gently suffused with it, and two thousand years later Edward Fitzgerald in his very free adaptation of "The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam" preaches a modern, but still a genuine, Epicureanism. And even the Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill describes a somewhat drab and intellectual Epicureanism broken to harness and put to work. It was against this doctrine that Carlyle the Platonist thundered in "Past and Present" the doctrine of Duty, resulting from the intuitive perception of the real truth that under-

lies appearances, as opposed to the purely intellectual conception that enlightened selfishness, the calculation of the means to happiness, will produce the greatest good for the greatest number.

Epicureanism divided the ancient world with Stoicism, that austere and puritanical philosophy that postulated a shadowy God in whom all the wise souls lost their identity at the last. The only happiness was wisdom and virtue, the only virtues those which Chesterton calls the rational virtues of paganism, Justice, Temperance, Magnanimity, Æquanimity, Prudence, Honesty, as opposed to the irrational virtues of Christianity, Faith, Hope, and Charity. The Stoics believed in brotherhood, social equality, internationalism, the City of God. The great works of Stoicism are the little diary-handbook "The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius" and the fuller treatment by the slave Epictetus. Stoicism is the practice and belief of many of our wisest and best men of today, who pass for Christian, but as Matthew Arnold showed us, it was absorbed by Christianity because the average man is not capable of living up to a severely austere intellectual moral standard; he needs the promises and rewards, the emotions and hopes of Christianity. I suppose the essay "A Free Man's Worship" by Bertrand Russell is our finest modern expression of the doctrine, though

Stevenson's essay "Pulvis Et Umbra" must not be forgotten.

All these were swallowed up in Christianity, and for a thousand years philosophy was only a logical elaboration of orthodox doctrine. If you find the veritable pages of St. Thomas Aquinas too stiff for you, you can browse in Taylor's "Mediæval Mind," that superb and voluminous work, or the opening chapter of Randall's "The Making of the Modern Mind." And you must know something about that great poem that displays the doctrine before us in unforgettable episodes, "The Divine Comedy" of Dante.

Hop, Skip and Jump

From now on philosophy becomes more and more hard, crabbed, technical and professional. The chances are that you will do as well to read about it in Randall as to read it. You will want to know how Descartes built up the "science" of epistemology, the nature of mind and thought, from his famous text "I think, therefore I am," and worked out a method equally useful for idealism or materialism. And how Spinoza, the "God-intoxicated" Jew, postulated the God whom today Einstein acknowledges. And how Francis Bacon emphasized not a philosophy but a method, that of induction from experiments instead of deduc-

tion from dogmatic first principles, to the great advancement of physical science. From now on science more and more affects philosophy. The concepts of the eighteenth century, theological, philosophical and political, were enormously affected by the orderly integration of the Newtonian physics; and the scepticism of Hume, who ruled out all *a priori* concepts not capable of being reduced to number as being as futile and incredible as so many speculations about the politics of the moon, is a parallel to the scepticism about all authority of Voltaire.

After the French Revolution the pendulum swings back again to idealism, a Platonism, in the hands of the great Germans, manipulated for the service of the State, and enormously affecting such Englishmen as Carlyle and Coleridge. In Boston and Concord a little group of serious thinkers, Alcott and Fuller and Emerson, finding first Calvinism and then Unitarianism too narrow for them, borrow German idealism and under the name of Transcendentalism popularize the notions that the self-reliant individual soul may, by tuning into the Oversoul, think intuitively far more effectively than if he depends on mere sceptical reason. So Plato still persists, in the doctrines of Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy and in the diluted Emersonianism we call New Thought.

In the middle of the nineteenth century great revolutions in thought take place. Renan and Strauss and Colenso pave the way for "higher criticism" in their doubts of the historical authenticity of much of the Bible. Marx in his "Capitalism" strikes a telling blow at Utilitarianism and its child Capitalistic Individualism. And Lyell the geologist, Darwin and Wallace the naturalists, Huxley the paleontologist, and Spencer the sociologist strike a body blow at the age-old notions of man's place in nature. You will not understand our age unless you comprehend once and for all that the two most important forces in the nineteenth century were Marxian Socialism and Darwinism. These two changed the map of the intellectual world. We move familiarly in dimensions our great-grandparents knew nothing of.

The Admirable Huxley

If you wish to begin to find your way about in this new world of science that has so affected modern philosophy, I should suggest first of all a short history of science, such as Eddy's or Sedgwick and Tyler's, though this latter is rather overweighted with mathematics for the average reader, and then, by all means, any one of several recent collections of essays by Thomas Henry Huxley, the clearest and most persuasive in exposition and ar-

gument of all modern writers. From such essays as The Nature of Evidence, A Piece of Chalk, A Liberal Education, The Physical Basis of Life, his review of Darwin's Origins, etc., you can get a notion of how the scientist thinks and works and may understand why it is that scientific thinking has so greatly displaced theological and metaphysical thinking in modern times. For out of this new world of science has come a philosophy that builds on science. If there is no longer any quarrel between science and religion it is because theology has been forced to abandon many of its old untenable pretensions.

The new "Realism" in philosophy, for instance, is hardly more than science interpreted. William James turned the corner when he insisted that philosophy must be based on the possibilities of human thinking as known to the psychologists. The dogmatic insistence on "absolute" truth, as held by the old idealists, and the equally dogmatic insistence that nothing need be believed unless it can be proved, as Clifford and Huxley held, were alike, James believed, beyond the ability of the human brain to determine. In his essay "The Will to Believe" he provided a method by which we might convince ourselves that belief in what is useful to us is valid. This he called Pragmatism. Bertrand Russell in his recent book "Sceptical Es-

says" argues that what man needs is not the will to believe but the wish to find out. H. G. Wells is a great modern pragmatist and Aldous Huxley a younger modern sceptic. Against all these G. K. Chesterton in "Orthodoxy" argues against the anarchy that comes from the mind being free to destroy itself and upholds the old Catholic authority as the safest defence of reason the world has ever known.

The Life Force

Over them all brood the two great shadows of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, both exalting will above reason; the elder finding all will evil and taking refuge in will-lessness as the only happiness; the younger exalting the will to become superior, the prophet of man as a bridge and no goal, of the superman. And this creative evolution, evolution by conscious will, leads in its train such poets and philosophers as Samuel Butler, the Frenchman Bergson, and G. Bernard Shaw whose "metabiological pentateuch"* is the long and amusing epic of this life-force and will to power.

Against it Henry Adams in his "Letter to Teachers of History" sees all progress in civilization made at the expense of dwindling life force and sees the time not far distant when energy is

*"Back to Methuselah."

expended so violently and acceleration is so vehement that all the universe, material and human, will become a stagnant pool whence no more power can be drawn—and the end of all things will be at hand.

These are some of the contradictory things our modern scientists and philosophers believe, and the chain extends from Plato and Democritus to Wells and Einstein without a break in the link.

It is an unbelievably complex world, far less easy to understand than that our fathers lived in, but, as always happens, the necessity brings out unfailingly the latent powers of man. Even though it be true, as many believe, that we are coming into an age in which the pattern of thought will be simply not decipherable by even the average well educated man, yet already the human intelligence is rousing itself nobly to grapple with the difficulty.

The Humanizing of Knowledge

There is no doubt in my mind that we are in the first years of a new period of "enlightenment," not unlike that of the eighteenth century which was signalized by the appearance of the Encyclopædists. No one can doubt it who can compare at first hand the stagnant and conventional intellectual life of our American colleges

twenty years ago, or even fifteen, with the hum of interest and experimentation that marks them today. The curricula of extension courses confirm this. The publishers' lists of today compared with those of twenty years ago show a buying public for non-fiction works, especially in the sciences and pseudo-sciences, which simply did not exist then. And the modern lending library has to allow more space for books other than fiction than used to be needed for fiction.

The wish to find out has awaked again and has created the instrument to serve it. The instrument is what James Harvey Robinson called some years ago "the humanizing of knowledge," that is, the bringing of the vast accessions of modern learning to the average non-expert person of intelligence in a form which he can comprehend. So much do the experts know that an English bishop recently called for a ten-year moratorium in research work to allow the world to catch up in understanding and finding uses for what is known. Instead, there is a flood of works intended to orient the average man in the thought of today. Professor Robinson with "The Mind in the Making," H. G. Wells with "An Outline of History" led the way. Today, after less than a decade, the movement for popularization has become so important that this year's new edition of the Ency-

clopædia Britannica, the fourteenth, is largely rewritten. The old-fashioned articles written in technical language by experts for experts, and presupposing a considerable knowledge of the subject, are now the work of publicists whose business it is to make complex things clear to non-expert minds.

The Englishman Drinkwater and the American John Macy have written outlines of literature, Orpen on modern art, boards of theologians and scientists on Christianity and the history of science, Will Durant and C. F. Potter on philosophy and religion, Randall on modern European thought, Dorsey on physiology, Eddington on the physical world as scientists see it today, and so on. These are but a few of the many, the reception and sales of which have been extraordinary from the point of view of twenty years ago.

The colleges have waked up to the extent of organizing their curricula, removing the temptations of the optimistic elective system from at least the under classmen, and have instituted "orientation" courses by which freshmen may be given a bird's-eye view of what we know today, surveys of history, science, philosophy and sociology, preparatory to later specialization.

Then come the interpreters, the men whose business it is to take all this material and try to

build from it a philosophy of life for the modern man. Three such books only this spring have been published. "The Modern Temper" by Joseph Wood Krutch (Harcourt, Brace Co.); "A Preface to Morals" by Walter Lippmann (Macmillan), and "Our Changing Civilization" by John Herman Randall, Jr. (Stokes). These draw together all the facts and theories that weigh on the consciousness of the interested person of today and attempt to apply them for intelligent living. These books might be called applied philosophy or even philosophical engineering.

Widdershins

This chapter has been an attempt, very sketchy and full of holes, to show you where to look if you would find the ideas that have from time to time dynamited the world we live in and shaken it into new combinations to be dynamited in their turn. Philosophers have always known that they stamped their patterns on a flux. And today even the scientists are acknowledging the same unpalatable fact. All we know, says Eddington, is that something, we don't know what, is doing something.

The only realities are eating and drinking, working, making love, and getting what irrational fun we can out of these processes. We like to be-

lieve that there is a meaning to them, we kid ourselves along with that hope, but when we survey all the philosophical systems and all the scientific hypotheses we know in our hearts that the oracles are dumb (in the Miltonic sense) and the augurs are even more dumb (in the modern sense), that every man's guess is as good as every other man's guess, and that Truth does not live even at the bottom of (H. G.) Wells.

Nevertheless the person who knows more or less what other people think it is all about, has that satisfaction dearest of all satisfactions to human beings: pride, thankfulness that he is not as other folks are; the virtue of the Pharisee, which is the dynamic virtue behind all learning and all literature. For the Pharisee is the patron saint of all scholars and professors, all critics, all authors and people who write books like this.

Part V

THE FRUITS—A POTPOURRI

READING, said Baron Verulam, maketh a full man. Reading, said an old New England farmer, rots the mind. But the farmer was only saying what that astonishing man, the Baron, had known long before that he was going to say. "Crafty men condemn studies." This does not mean that if you are particularly clever you can get along without books. It means that if you work at a craft, if you are a carpenter or a mason earning fifteen dollars a day, you will despise the young college instructor or library assistant and their knowledge of books which, apparently, keeps them from earning a living. "Crafty" men are sometimes carpenters and sometimes bankers or motor car manufacturers, but their reaction is about the same. Brothers under the skin.

Books As Stabilizers

They are right, of course. There is something about the continuous companionship of books that unfits a man for the ruthlessness of the labor union and the manufacturers' association, the pleasant business habit of dog eating dog. Unless they are the books which guarantee to teach you how to be a business success. Anyone who has been

misled into buying this book in the belief that the art of intelligent reading will help him to make money is out of luck and pocket.

Reading makes not only a full man, it makes a contented man. It would be worth money to our bankers and politicians to have our country saturated with this book. A nation of inveterate readers would make no political upsets, no economic revolutions. The age of great revolutions was an age when people read little and dreamed hard. But a reading people knows that all systems are about equally good—or bad—and is content to leave the boss and the banker to their profitable manipulations. Reading is, if nothing better, an effective anodyne. In ardent youth, it is true, reading may sometimes stimulate a boy of the right temperament to action. But if he keeps on acting, he will stop reading. And if he keeps on reading, he will stop acting. There is nothing quite so placid and complacent as the middle-age of "literary" radicals. "I have known three and twenty leaders of revolt," said the Cardinal. They were probably intellectuals, which is to say, reading men. The wider the reading, the more speculative the thinking, and the safer the established order. But when the non-reading man takes a notion and gets into his stride—look out!

Bacon With Variations

Old Sir Francis knew all this. In that best known of his essays, so curiously compounded of affection and contempt for studies, he shows us clearly the Lord Chancellor (who was disgraced for bribery) sitting in judgment on the scholar who wrote "The Advancement of Learning" and died of an unnecessary cold contracted while advancing it.

"Reading serves for delight in privacy" (the only kind of reading this book deals with). "It serves also for ornament in discourse," dinner table conversation about books one has not necessarily looked at. Nowadays it is being made easy for us to talk about books without having read them, which Sir Francis would doubtless call an "affectation." "But to manage affairs by books is the humor (or notion) of a scholar." So said the man who wrote so wisely on riches and amassed them so unwisely.

"Simple men admire studies"—hardly an unmixed compliment!—"and wise men use them, *for they teach not their own use.*" That is why this book was written. "They perfect nature and are perfected by experience." One cannot help thinking that the Viscount St. Albans's love of antithesis has led him astray here. Would it not be better

to say that they blur nature? Through books one sees nature as through a glass darkly, even, as Mark Twain amended, as through a glass eye darkly. And they may perfect, or they may contradict, experience.

"Read not to contradict and confute," that is, do not let yourself always be showing how much more right you are than is another human being like yourself. "Nor to believe and take for granted." As Will Rogers says: all I know is what I see in the papers. "Nor to find talk and discourse," unless of course you make your living by it, as I do. And even then only when you are being paid for it. There is nothing more terrible than to be forced by a bookish enthusiast to talk sleepily about something he has read and you haven't, when what you really want to talk about is Prohibition, its cause and cure. "But to weigh and consider." No hammock literature! No summer novels! You cannot *read* by the blotting paper process. Reading is an exercise, like putting up weights. Reading should give you a good workout, with plenty of brain sweat. If you can't stand the gaff, there are always the talking movies.

"Conference maketh a ready man; writing an exact man." Reading won't help you to be quick on the trigger, nor particularly exact. If you want to be quick on the trigger, join a three-hours-for-

lunch club; if you want to be accurate, without leakage, write, and write—and write. But "reading maketh a full man," the satisfaction of which, I take it, is entirely inward and personal.

And last of all, *"studia abeunt in mores."* Manners maketh the man, and reading maketh the manners. On the whole we readers are a mannerly and quiet lot. There is about us little hustle and bustle, little of that obsession that afflicts those idealists whom Wells calls the Gawdsakers, they who are always exclaiming "For Gawd's sake, let's *do* something!" little even of that less purposeful wish to go places and do things, which afflicts the younger set. We are inclined to give in and agree with others, for argument breaks the thread of a book. Public libraries have taught us how (and when) to be silent, and the reading of books which we cannot afford to buy, in bookstores, has taught us to be inconspicuous. Much acquaintance with imaginary personages has taught us never to be surprised at any anomalies in human shape and much acquaintance with printed notions has taught us never to be surprised, or shocked, or too hopeful about anything anybody says. On the whole, we might be worse.

Original and Imitation

There remains the dictum the most necessary

and the most difficult of all. "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, others to be chewed and digested." But which ones? Sir Francis does not tell us, and I have not been able to tell you. The selection depends on each of you. No man's needs are the same, nor no woman's either. One supposes from the newspapers that detective stories are absolutely necessary to great executives, supreme court judges, and college professors, else the nation could not function. Yet police captains probably do very well without them.

The most one can urge is that you try to develop that sixth sense which enables you to tell an original from an imitation. Most literature and art is imitation. Most story tellers and painters are more artisans than artists, might just as well have been real-estate agents or shop-keepers. To them the prevailing artistic mode is the only reality, as it is to most readers. Invention is beyond them. Once in a blue moon one runs across a writer who has something new to say or says it in a new way. He will begin as a freak and (probably) end as a classic. Much reading ought to be able to do this at least for you, to enable your ear to distinguish the accent of the original from that of the imitators. Strachey, for instance, and Bradford, are originals in the new biography. They have hundreds of imitators, who never go to

original sources, who simply revamp a standard biography, smear it with psychoanalysis, decorate it with wise-cracks, and call it an "interpretation." Bacon had a word for these, too, these books by deputy—"less important arguments, meaner sort of books . . . distilled books are like common distilled waters, flashy things." Their taste is unmistakable.

So much of the literary products of our universities, as well as of our professional journalists and critics, are distilled waters, hashes of their betters, warmed-overs. Not all the parade of references and bibliographies and indices can hide the lamentable fact. No wonder that newspaper reviewers learn to read books by the dozen instead of singly, no wonder that Arnold Bennett tells us quite simply how it is possible for an experienced reader to confront a dozen new books and write a competent notice of them in the space of an hour. But once you taste an original, duties no longer press, time is forgotten, and there is silence in Heaven for the space of half an hour!

Sales Resistance

We must build up sales resistance against the imitations. Discount the publisher's blurb, the facile enthusiasms of the columnist-critic, the canny exploitations of the book clubs, even the too-

conscientious reading lists of the women's clubs. We must build up defences for our integrity as intelligent beings against this monstrous pressure of advertising. Fortunately we have a defence against literary ptomaine; the taste of the imitation, once one has the habit of reading, is unmistakable. The canned short story, the *ersatz* novel, the play written for Hollywood carries its own damnation in its very phrasing. By browsing in book shops, at the open shelves of public libraries (for all civilized public libraries have open shelves), one will learn soon enough to distinguish the cheap, the sensational, the vulgar, the ephemeral, the second-hand, from that which is, if not great, at least honest. We can make a practice of boosting the honest originals before the world exploits them. Think of the permanent inner satisfaction of those readers who learned to cherish Joseph Conrad in the early years when he was hard put to it to find a publisher. Today there is no magazine-serial romancer who cannot conradize.

"Hobbs tints blue, straight he turtle eats,
Nobbs prints blue, claret crowns his cup,
Both Stokes and Noakes outvie in azure feats.
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?"

Only the trained and developed taste of the

intelligent reader will encourage the Conrads to struggle through and will keep the conradizers from usurping the better place.

The Broad-Brow

By this time you will have resigned yourself to the fact that I have given you no hard and fast rules for distinguishing between the genuine and the pinchbeck. If you are naïve and credulous you may be still hoping for at least one magic formula before I end this chapter. There will be none. I haven't any. The art of intelligent reading is, after all, the art of pulling one's self up by one's own boot-straps. It is the art of putting up a muscle. All I can say is, with old Kami, *Continuez.* Keep reading. One day, perhaps suddenly, you will feel sure of yourself. You will know. You will find yourself ready to stand by your guns against no-matter-whom.

All I have done, or tried to do, is to draw attention to your own faults of temperament, to the habits of critics, to the nature of artists and thinkers. I have named for you a certain number of books, some of them works of the creative imagination, some of them aids to understanding, stepping stones, a *gradus ad Parnassum.* Not all of them are works of genius but all of them will prove, I think, helpful. I have pointed out certain

technical elements in certain *genres* of literature, shown you what materials are to be found in others.

I have tried to show you that the Absolute is a mythical bird. All criticism is comparative and cumulative. The more you read the more material you will have to compare with the newest book which may be in question. The more you read the higher will be the tower from which, like a fire warden, you can watch for signs of new conflagrations in literature, distinguishing easily the thin chimney smoke from that denser and blacker cloud that presages a real fire.

Above all I have tried, by example as well as by precept, to show the uses of catholicity. Do not get too deep into habits of reading. Ruts in culture are as bad as ruts in roads. Only while I was writing the last chapter or two I found in the newest book of H. G. Wells, that very interesting chapter on the art of the movie in the scenario-novel "The King Who Was a King," a few sentences I should like to quote for your edification.

"The terms High-brow and Low-brow need to be supplemented by Broad-brow. The High-brow has nothing to learn and the Low-brow will learn nothing; in effect they are the same thing. The High-brow is only the Low-brow plus pretentiousness. It is the same sort of brain stood on end.

"The Broad-brow is as anxious not to be 'arty' as the Low-brow and as terrified of the cheap and obvious as the High-brow. His rôle is neither to disdain the current thing nor to accept it, but to learn from it."

This, I take it, is good gospel. Bind it about thy neck; write it upon the table of thine heart.

Emerson would have one write above his study door the word WHIM.

Personal and individual taste, the fruit of experience, is one thing. But literary exclusiveness for the looks of the thing is mere poverty of the spirit. I pray you, avoid it.

Literature as Dynamite

Literature is neither a pastime nor, as the jargon of today goes, an escape. Literature is meat and drink. It is full of calories and vitamines. It is a tonic and a stimulus. Even to the sick it is not an opiate, but oxygen and blood-transfusion, that precious life blood of master spirits of which Milton speaks. More people have been restored to health by books than have been poisoned by them.

I say "books" but I mean particularly imaginative literature. To the literal-minded there is something a little absurd and pathetic in the notion that one may learn more from works of the imagination than from those of the intelligence. Yet for

the average reader I am inclined to believe this is true. Pity the poor scientist! Lord Kelvin says somewhere: "When you can express what you are talking about in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind."

Logical enough, I suppose, but what thin and tabloid nourishment for most of us! Man's intellect is recent and undependable; his imagination is old and powerful and sure. That is why imaginative literature is the greatest lever in the world.

> "One man with a dream, at pleasure,
> Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
> And three with a song's new measure
> Can trample a kingdom down."

But, say you, this is a flat contradiction of what I said in the second and third paragraphs of this very chapter! I think not. There I was speaking of the "reader," the habitual soaker-in of literature. Here I am speaking of the dynamic effects of literature as it filters down through the inert habitué of books to those far more numerous people to whom the rare book and the rare idea come as a strong stimulus, a spur to action. The critic and the teacher may deal with books without being moved by them, but they cannot avoid hand-

ing their ideas on to those whose only way of dealing with ideas is to translate them into action. Remember King Auberon and Adam Wayne in "The Napoleon of Notting Hill." The professor who teaches Nietzsche may remain a rabbit, but if there be one young Mussolini in his class he yet may find his quiet world upset for him.

Stevenson once said: "The most influential books and the truest in their influence are works of fiction. They do not pin the reader to a dogma, which he must afterwards discover to be inexact; they do not teach him a lesson which he must afterwards unlearn. They repeat, they rearrange, they clarify the lessons of life . . . they show us the web of experience, not as we can see it for ourselves, but with a singular change,—that monstrous, consuming ego of our being, for the nonce, struck out."

For "fiction," read poetry, drama, the essay, all literature that is not merely an objective record of fact. And to greater height the same standard is raised in one of the most important paragraphs of modern critical writing, one written so long ago by H. G. Wells that I haven't the slightest idea in which of his books it is to be found. It states once and for all the case for the poet, whether in the novel or play or poem.

"It (the novel) is to be the social mediator,

the vehicle of understanding, the instrument of self-examination, the parade of morals and exchange of manners, the factory of customs, the criticism of laws and institutions and of social dogmas and ideas. It is to be the home confessional, the initiator of knowledge, the seed of fruitful self-questioning. Let me be very clear here; I do not mean for a moment that the novelist is going to set up as a sort of teacher, as a sort of priest with the pen, who will make men and women believe and do this and that. The novel is not a new sort of pulpit; humanity is passing out of the phase when men sit under preachers and dogmatize influences.

"But the novelist is going to be the most potent of artists, because he is going to present conduct, devise beautiful conduct, discuss conduct, analyze conduct, suggest conduct, illuminate it through and through. He will not teach, but discuss, point out, plead and display. And this being my view, you will be prepared for the demand I am now about to make for an absolutely free hand for the novelist in his choice of topic and incident and in his method of treatment; or rather, if I may presume to speak for other novelists, it is not so much a demand we make as an intention we proclaim.

"We are going to write, subject only to our

own limitations, about the whole of human life. We are going to deal with social questions and political questions and religious questions. We cannot present people unless we have this free hand, this unrestricted field. What is the good of telling stories about people's lives if one may not deal freely with the religious beliefs and organizations that have controlled or failed to control them? What is the good of pretending to write about love and loyalties and treacheries and quarrels of men and women, if one must not glance at those varieties of physical temperament and organic quality, those deeply passionate needs and distresses from which half the storms of human life are brewed? We mean to deal with all those things. . . .

"We are going to write about it all. We are going to write about business and finance and politics and precedence and pretentiousness and decorum and indecorum, until a thousand pretences and ten thousand impostures shrivel in the cold clear air of our elucidations. We are going to write of wasted opportunities and latent beauties until a thousand new ways of living open to men and women. We are going to appeal to the young and the hopeful and the curious, against the established, the dignified, and the defensive.

Before we have done we will have all life within the scope of the novel."

On Slaying the Jabberwock

That seems to me a fair statement of what the poet can do for the reader, if the reader will meet him half-way. But the reader must protect the poet, must see to it that he is allowed a society in which he may function freely.

There are many who insist that he must not function at all save under strict control. Some from that extreme reverence for the powers of the state which is gradually replacing the old, traditionally American, give-and-take of democratic individualism. Some from a sick distrust of human nature. Some from sheer stupidity, incapacity to understand any but the simplest village propositions. Some from religious intolerance, a wresting of the Scriptures. These are all enemies of civilization and it is justifiable to fight them by every means, even with their own weapons.

I am not worried about legal regulation, *i.e.,* the laws upon the statute books, except when, as in Massachusetts, they are a direct incitement to blackmail of booksellers and publishers by irresponsible persons. Bad laws, history tells us, nullify themselves. Even if one does not follow that

oldest and strongest tradition of American democracy and deliberately disobey them, they will dwindle from anæmia and grow obsolescent from neglect.

No, the difficulty is rather that in America the liberal must be always on the defensive. He is fighting for his belief in the essential decency and trustworthiness of the human race and its right to freedom. Yet let any self-appointed moralist, censor, holier-than-thou, proclaim the purity of his motives and he will have the crowd with him against the liberal. For the crowd will always take the easiest way, and it is far easier to attack than to defend, far easier to rouse prejudice by passion than to resolve it by reason.

The last advice in this book, therefore, must be positive. Let us assume that you are a person normally intelligent and physiologically mature. Remember this: no human being is good enough to tell you what you shall and shall not read, nor wise enough, nor disinterested enough, nor powerful enough. I am not speaking of children, whose regulation is the affair of their parents, nor of morons, whose regulation is the affair of the state. But a girl who is old enough to be married at eighteen is old enough to read what she likes. A boy who is old enough to be let out of school to

support himself at sixteen, is old enough to read what he likes. Any boy or girl able to enter college is intellectually competent to read adult literature. Remember this, too, that any regulations intended ostensibly to protect the child and the feeble-minded will fall most heavily in their application not on them but on the normal adult.

The notion, that the strong and fit and able should penalize themselves, or be penalized without their consent, lest the weak and incapable and unfit suffer, is a doctrine that levels a civilization down not up. The notion that the intellectual and æsthetic capacities of the lowest third of the population should be taken as a standard to which all the rest shall be held down is in its nature so foolish and so wicked that one would think it needs only to be mentioned to be refuted. Yet it is the rule in our public school education and in all discussions concerning the arts and literature.

Here, then, is the last necessity for intelligent reading, the self-respect of a free citizen in a free community, that stern English puritan self-respect that barbed Milton's "Areopagitica" and Mill's "Liberty" and Thoreau's "On the Duty of Civil Disobedience."

In our day it must be aimed, not merely against "the never-ending insolence of elected officials,"

against the tyrant and the inquisitor, but against the bigoted, the self-righteous and self-satisfied, the stupid and well-meaning, the uplifter and the reformer—against all those who have nothing to learn from Literature and will learn nothing, for that their eyes are holden.

For the rest of us literature is the liberator, if we will let it liberate us. In the beginning was the Word—and at the end the Word is still the only saviour.

THE END

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